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THE EXPERIENCES OF THE RURAL SCHOOL COUNSELLOR: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

PATRICK J. MORRISSETTE

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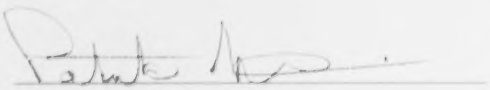

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Experiences of the Rural School Counsellor: A Phenomenological Study submitted by Patrick J. Morrissette in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselling Psychology.

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DEDICATION

It is a privilege to dedicate this dissertation to the people of Goose Village, Griffin Town and Point St. Charles of Montreal, Quebec. It is only because of the intensity, determination and loyalty which they lived by and encouraged that I am able to overcome obstacles and achieve my personal goals.

Abstract

To gain a deeper understanding of the rural school counsellor, this study explored experiences of these professionals within the Province of Alberta using a qualitative phenomenological research orientation. Five experienced school counsellors participated in a tape-recorded interview in which they described personal experiences, yielding written protocols that were thematically analyzed. A final thematic analysis was conducted to examine the similarities and differences of experiences among co-researchers.

Results of the study provided eight salient themes which are experienced by rural school counsellors. The eight themes are as follows: (1) privacy and anonymity, (2) sense of isolation, (3) performing a dual role, (4) community networking, (5) lack of community resources, (6) lack of formal training opportunities, (7) peer and administrative support and, (8) continuity of relationships. The themes that emerged from the data are discussed in the overall synthesis.

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Clearly, the success of an individual is a result of the support and efforts of others. This has proven to be especially true in my case. As such, I would I like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Judy Maynes, Dr. Len Stewin and Dr. Fern Snart from the University of Alberta and Mrs. Shirley Voyna Wilson and Mr. Bob Hall from the University of Calgary who in quiet and humble ways shared their wisdom and provided invaluable guidance during my academic program and internship experience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF TOPIC

General Overview

School counselling has been described as a profession in transition (Kennedy, 1988) and one which is inexorably tied to current changes in the education system (Mustaine, LaFountain & Pappalardo, 1993). Faced with a myriad of responsibilities, school counsellors are having to re-assess their current situation and understand the change processes that confront them (e.g., Roberts, 1983). The rapid change of society has undoubtedly influenced and impacted the human services offered within the school system. Within the Province of Alberta, for example, elementary school counsellors reported an increase in aggressive behavior and crisis intervention with students who are coping with family dissolution (Guidance Council of the Alberta Teacher's Association, 1993). A survey conducted by Madak & Gieni (1991) found similar reports among elementary school teachers in Winnipeg, Manitoba who disclosed having to spend additional time dealing with family problems, peer conflict and behavior problems. Gibson (1989) asserts that elementary school counsellors are recognizing and emphasizing the importance of preventative programing within the schools. In a study exploring critical incidents experienced by school counsellors in Alberta, school problems, family problems and suicide were major areas in which school counsellors felt they had little impact (Gora, Sawatzky & Hague, 1992). As such, the experiences of school counsellors can vary depending upon their unique circumstances. Neely and Iburg (1989) suggest that the types of problems encountered by school counsellors may fluctuate from era to era and conclude,

"There has been a serious lack of measures that reveal the daily, difficult problems encountered by school counselors from different communities, especially when helping individuals unlike themselves in race, sex, and exceptionality" (p. 179). Accordingly, Carreiro & Schulz (1988) remark that school counsellors would likely have to be increasingly involved in professional development in order to meet the rapidly changing values and needs of students, school personnel and parents.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To better meet the needs of the school counsellor, altering counsellor education programs (Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Conger, 1983; Hague, 1987; Henjum, 1983; MacKenzie, 1983; Paisley & Peace, 1995; Roberts, 1983; Schulz & Ertelt, 1991; Wayne, 1983), as well as, clearly setting counsellor priorities (Herman, Robertson & West, 1986; Partin, 1993) have been suggested. Among others (e.g., Peace, 1995; Rotter, 1990; Sayers, Carroll & Loesch, 1996), Janzen, Paterson & Paterson (1993) address the pressures experienced by universities to change professional programs in order to reflect societal and professional demands. Consequently, there is a need for counsellor education programs to reassess what is offered and what is actually needed by counsellors (e.g., Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984; Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Gora & Hague, 1990; Madak & Gieni, 1991; Mendaglio & Altmann, 1988; Morse & Russell, 1988; Morrissette, 1996). The benefit of consulting and involving school counsellors in the process of counsellor education program design and curriculum has been acknowledged (Campbell & Robinson, 1990; Carroll, 1993; Sisson & Bullis, 1992; Sweeney, Navin & Myers, 1984).

Previous studies that have been conducted to obtain information for program design have relied heavily on surveys that include rating scales for a pre-selected group of items. Rarely are counsellors asked to provide information in an open-ended manner. Baker (1995) elaborates:

> The more traditional approaches to research in the fields and disciplines associated with school counseling are quantitative in nature, being manifested in research reports often containing numerical data and tables from, for example, experiments, investigations, and surveys. Research of this nature requires reducing a phenomenon to attributes that can be controlled and clearly defined and results in studies that are often about parts of a larger phenomenon. p. 339

According to Drew (1993) and Giorgi (1994) the phenomenological orientation is being used more in the human sciences because of its focus on human experience and its inherent qualities to connect people to one another while validating experiences. Maxwell (1996) adds, "In a qualitative study, you are interested not only in the physical events and behavior that is taking place, but also in how the participants in your study make sense of this and how their understandings influence their behavior" (p. 17). The common assumptions and methods that exist between counselling psychology practice and qualitative research process (Gama, 1992) created what seemed to be a natural union for this specific study. As a result, a phenomenological orientation was chosen to uncover the inner experiences of the school counsellor. The rationale for this orientation is as follows:

1. Phenomenology values the co-researcher's subjective reality.

2. Phenomenology is the art of meaning creation (Valle & King, 1978). Therefore, the meaning of certain aspects of counsellor experience could be made clearer for the counselling profession.
3. Phenomenology is concerned with both the structure of experience and the content of this experience. As such, the structure of counsellor experience can be kept in focus as well as the content of his or her experience.
4. Phenomenology requires that the events and experiences of the co-researchers be understood in a relational context. This is consistent with the idea that the counsellor's experience should be considered in the context of the counselling environment.
5. The dialogal relationship within phenomenology promotes spontaneous and ongoing communication between co-researchers. This type of relationship encourages the researcher to elicit the cooperation of the co-researcher while developing an accurate reflection of the individual's experience.

Consequently, this study asked a sample of Alberta rural school counsellors to describe their experiences in a tape-recorded interview. Following the interview, the tape was transcribed and written protocols were developed to form a first order abstraction which consisted of excerpts, paraphrases and themes. After this phase was completed, second order thematic clusters were developed along with corresponding cluster descriptions. Finally, an overall synthesis was formulated which provided an overview of the co-researcher's experience. The procedure used in this study was useful in identifying common themes experienced by rural school counsellors as illustrated in Table 4-5. Co-researchers involved in this study represented elementary, junior high and high school programs

PHENOMENON OF INTEREST AND BRACKETING

By virtue of orienting myself to the experiences of the rural school counsellor, I have indicated a particular interest in this topic. Various experiences throughout my career have undoubtedly influenced this orientation. My previous experience may also put certain preconceptions in place.

1. Having served as a clinical supervisor and consultant to rural school counsellors over the past several years, I have been very curious about the personal experience of these professionals. The model of supervision and consultation which I practice could be best described as interactional in nature. I am very interested in the broader context within which problems emerge as well as the personhood and professional development of the counsellor. As a result of my previous interactions with school counsellors, I expected these professionals to elaborate on the stress and emotional burden they experienced.
2. Through my interactions with rural school counsellors over the years, I have become more aware of their dwindling resources and the increased demands placed upon them. From my perspective, the school counsellor is expected to fulfill more functions while contending with student problems which are more serious in nature. Consequently, I was assuming that a major issue for the school counsellor was personal despair due to limited resources.
3. Having a career goal of teaching in a counsellor education program, I was interested in learning more about the inner experiences of the school counsellor. Although my graduate training was in counsellor education, I have not practiced in a school setting and therefore, the current needs of the school counsellor were foreign to me. By gaining a better understanding of their

experiences, I was hoping to become more sensitive to both personal and professional needs, and thus become a more informed and effective instructor.

4. The scarcity of research pertaining to the inner experience of the school counsellor also prompted my desire to contribute to what I consider a very important profession. Although the daily frustrations of the school counsellor have been explored in other research, the inner experiences of these professionals have been neglected. The qualitative focus of this study allowed for an uncovering of the counsellor's experience.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Appreciating the significant role which school counsellors can play in the lives of children (e.g., Mustaine, LaFountain, & Pappalardo, 1993) underscores the need to better understand the inner experience of these professionals. Parr (1991), for example, punctuates the correlation between the resolution of ethical and workplace dilemmas that face school counsellors and their overall satisfaction and effectiveness. Parr (1991) cites examples of the common dilemmas that are encountered by school counsellors and includes: demands from the school principal, demands from teachers and demands from parents. In terms of specific problems experienced by school counsellors, Mott (1975) has identified: isolation, inadequacy of training and maintaining the role of an intermediary.

There was much to know about the actual experience of school counsellors. The absence of studies exploring the inner experience of these professionals clearly indicated a need for further research in this area. Although existing research provides statistical data and generic information, it fails to uncover intimate detail regarding their lived experience. Research that is designed to understand the

actual experience of rural school counsellors can potentially influence current curriculum design while benefiting both the counselling profession and the children who are served by counselling professionals. To reiterate, this study looked at the actual experience of each school counsellor. By using a phenomenological orientation, I have systematically worked toward uncovering the inner experience of each counsellor in this study. It is my hope that this inquiry adds to our understanding of a rural school counsellor's actual experience and will be beneficial to counsellor education programs which prepare professionals to work in the rural areas (Sutton & Southworth, 1990).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question searches for the meaning of a phenomenon so that it may be more fully understood (Ray, 1990). According to Gadamer (1989) the essence of the question is the opening up and keeping open of possibilities. Accordingly, Bergum (1989) states:

> Questioning indicates the existence of an unsettled issue, a difficult matter, an uncertainty, a matter for discussion. It also invites a reply, a dialogue, a searching out of opposites and similarities. It opens possibilities. p. 45

The nature of the question is critical to the phenomenologic quest for a rich description and interpretative understanding. The rural school counsellor's descriptions of experience are the base for this inquiry. The research question being asked is: What is the experience of working as a rural school counsellor? The objective of this study was to uncover the personal experiences of the rural school counsellor. What is the counsellor's actual experience? Is each counsellor's experience fundamentally different or are there similarities or patterns which

characterize the school counsellor? By using a phenomenological orientation to understand each counsellor's experience, I attempted to: (1) discover the underlying essence or structure of the counsellor's experience and (2) discern similarities or differences in patterns among the counsellors who were involved in this study.

In Chapter II, a detailed literature review regarding school counsellor research is provided. In Chapter III, the methodology and procedures that underpin this study is discussed. In Chapter IV, the presentation of the findings is elaborated upon. Finally, Chapter V, contains a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research pertaining to urban and rural school counsellors who function at various levels within the educational system. Due to the many issues that are commonly shared by rural school psychologists, relevant material from this discipline has been included. Within this overview, the role of the school counsellor and the significant issues that impact their work (e.g., stress, burnout, fatigue, decay and critical issues) are discussed.

PERCEIVED ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

A subject which continues to receive widespread attention throughout the literature pertains to the actual role of the school counsellor (Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984; Brown, 1980, 1974a, 1974b, 1974c; Calder & Chorney, 1995; Calder & Rankin, 1995; Carreiro & Schulz, 1987; Carroll, 1993; Carstensen & Melnychuk, 1980; Common, 1990; Emerson, 1984; Furlong, Atkinson & Janoff, 1993; Gadsby, 1980; Ginter, Scalise & Presse, 1990; Hardesty & Dillard, 1994; Henjum, 1981; Herman, 1984; Lamb & Deschenes, 1974; Merchant & Zingle, 1977; Miller, 1989; Morse & Russell, 1988; Murray, 1995). According to Murray (1995), over the past decade the role of the counsellor has been frequently questioned and researched. As such, Murray (1995) echoes an earlier concern expressed by Altmann & Herman (1982) and concludes that, "...the role of the school counsellor reflects a history of unclear definition and confusion" (p. 6). She attributes this confusion to the changing fabric of society and the increased demands that are subsequently placed on the school system. Over a decade ago,

Schmidt (1984) noted that both local and global changes have influenced changes in the educational, psychological and behavioral patterns of young people. In response to the changing landscape of school counselling, Dolan (1991) emphasizes the need for counsellors to determine students' concerns and create appropriate action plans. Consequently, school counsellors now face challenges that go beyond vocational and educational planning. A significant implication associated with poor role definition is the possible eruption of conflict between school counsellors and their colleagues, the inability to effectively function in their job (Ginter, Scalise & Presse, 1990; Merchant, 1976) and burnout (Huebner & Huberty, 1984; McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1985). Additionally, poor role definition can also eventuate in the perception that the school counsellor is less than professional and therefore, faces greater risk to change when compared to other elementary professionals (Carroll, 1993).

In tracing the evolution of the school counselling profession, Schmidt (1984) and Gysbers (1990) discuss how the profession has shifted from one of vocational guidance (testing and individual counselling) to a clinically oriented approach (counselling and assessment) and finally to a developmental approach (consultation and coordination). Despite the interest in the area of role definition, several authors (e.g., Hardesty & Dillard, 1994; Lee & Workman, 1992) charge that there is a paucity of sound and meaningful empirical research on counsellor roles, functions and activities as practiced. In reference to Alberta school counsellors, Herman (1983) asserts, "In reality, close examination of the literature shows that counsellor education programs are poorly defined, lack a systemic approach, and do not follow a universally accepted model" (p. 14). These findings support an

historical perspective offered by Warnath (1979) who says, "Because of their almost exclusive emphasis on counselor-client interactions, counselor-education programs do not prepare counsellors for the impact that being family and community members can have on their view of themselves and their jobs" (p. 327).

According to Aubrey (1985) counselling in schools has been perceived as a periphery function and consequently, school counsellors have allowed themselves to become isolated and less involved in school operations. An overview of existing research pertaining to the role of the school counsellor follows.

Counsellor Role as Perceived by Teachers

A study regarding how teachers perceive the role of the school counsellor was conducted by Ginter, Scalise & Presse (1990). In this study, a sample of 313 public elementary school teachers in the State of Louisiana were surveyed. Teachers were specifically selected as respondents due to their unique position as observers and consumers of the services provided by school counsellors.

Results from this self report study indicated that the school counsellor was perceived as performing two basic roles which included the helper role and the consultant role. The helper role primarily involved activities concerning counselling, testing and making appropriate referrals. The consultant role reflected activities that involved professional and technical advice (e.g., role playing techniques). This latter finding, supports earlier work by Wilgus & Shelley (1988) suggesting that counsellors are increasingly being viewed by teachers as fulfilling a consultant role thus, helping teachers acquire necessary behavioral techniques which they can then use.

Prompted by Shertzer & Stone's (1963) metaphor of the old ghost [italics original] regarding the confusion and conflicting expectations surrounding the school counsellor's role, Remley & Albright (1988) set out to determine the role of middle school counsellors as perceived by students, teachers and parents. Through the use of the structured interview process, these researchers questioned students, teachers, principals and parents about the role of the school counsellor. Results indicated that each group believed that the school counsellor should help students resolve personal problems. Interestingly enough, this study also revealed that students were skeptical about the counsellor maintaining confidentiality and associated the counsellor with discipline. Teachers thought that counsellors needed to convince them that they were in fact counselling and not performing administrative tasks. Although appreciating school counsellors, principals expected them to perform inappropriate administrative duties.

In a similar study, Miller (1989) surveyed teachers, principals and parents to determine how they perceived the relevance of elementary school guidance and counselling functions in Minnesota. The survey consisted of 28 functions that included: developmental/career guidance, consulting, counselling, evaluation/ assessment, program development and management. It was found that principals strongly supported 24 of the 28 functions identified. Teacher responses were very similar to those of principals, in that all but one response were the same. Parents strongly supported 23 out of the 28 functions identified. In the overall comparison of these three groups, it appeared that the role of the elementary school counsellor was strongly supported.

Cole, Miller, Splittgerber & Allen (1980) surveyed 569 teachers to obtain their views on guidance services within their schools. Although teachers were generally satisfied with the guidance programs within their schools, survey results indicated that instituting counselling programs in the classroom, encouraging greater teacher involvement in the counselling process and strengthening their professional identity were seen as ways of enhancing guidance programs.

The notion that school counsellors were not liked by teachers was proven incorrect in an early study by Sherman & Shapiro (1969). After surveying 440 teachers in five counties of the New York metropolitan area, they found that although there was some dissatisfaction among teachers, counsellors were regarded as likeable, effective and valued members within the school. Furthermore, teachers reported that face to face interaction with counsellors was very helpful and they wished to become more involved in guidance related activities.

Counselor Role as Perceived by Self

Kameen, Robinson & Rotter (1985) attempted to gain insight into the coordination activities of elementary and middle school counsellors. To do so, a questionnaire was sent to 400 elementary and middle school counsellors in 12 southwestern states. Findings from this study indicated that counsellors believed that they were too involved in activities such as: disseminating various forms of information and coordination and maintaining educational records. The counsellors surveyed believed that their energy should be directed towards conducting needs assessment, developing guidance programs and conducting parent groups. In essence, there was a discrepancy between what roles the

respondents were actually performing and the roles they believed they should be performing.

Along a similar vein, Furlong, Atkinson & Janoff (1979) were interested in establishing whether a consensus existed among elementary school counsellors in California in terms of what they actually do and what they would like to do. After surveying counsellors from 43 different school districts, it was discovered that elementary school teachers spent a sizable amount of their time performing individual and group counselling and minimal time in the area of evaluation (which was ranked as the least preferred activity). This finding coincides with other studies (e.g., Campbell & Robinson, 1990; Deck, Cecil & Cobia, 1990; Lee & Workman, 1992; Myrick, 1984; Remer, 1981; Wilson, 1985) regarding the dearth of research regarding school counselling and the lack of interest expressed by school counsellors to conduct research. A similar trend has emerged in school psychology (Meacham & Peckham, 1978). Basically, this specific study by Furlong, Atkinson & Janoff (1979) indicated that counsellors were in fact performing tasks which they considered ideal which conflicted with findings from the aforementioned study by Kameen, Robinson & Rotter (1985).

Morse & Russell (1988) conducted research with a similar focus regarding the counsellor's ideal and actual role. To do so, they surveyed 130 elementary school counsellors in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. It was discovered from this particular study, that school counsellors consider their role as a group facilitator as the most important. Consequently, there was a discrepancy between the ideal and actual ratings thus, supporting Kameen, Robinson & Rotter's (1985) finding which similarly demonstrated conflict between the ideal and actual

function of the school counsellor. More specifically, respondents felt that group counselling should be their priority where in fact, it was only the third activity which they actually performed. This project was part of a larger endeavor to contrast counsellor and parental perceptions of the counsellors' role (Mores, Russell & Kranzler, 1985). It was suggested that the desire of counsellors to serve as consultants to their teaching colleagues was a reflection of the special needs presented by students in the classroom. This hypothesis of course, reflects the aforementioned concern of Schmidt (1984) and Wilson & Rotter (1982) regarding how the changing fabric of society will influence the school system. As noted by Morse & Russell (1988), the preference for group work may indicate: (1) that counsellors are feeling overwhelmed with individual student needs, (2) that counsellors recognize the influence of the peer group and, (3) that counsellors are realizing the cost effectiveness of group work.

In a Canadian study, Carreiro & Schulz (1988) investigated the activities of elementary school counsellors throughout the country to determine activities which school counsellors valued but, had little time to do. As reported in the questionnaire results, valued activities included: making presentations, organizing and supervising programs and observing students in the classroom. Conversely, activities that were least valued included: filling in for teachers, playground supervision, curriculum committee work and helping students with projects. This study further revealed that elementary school counsellors are invested in working with colleagues and parents but may lack appropriate training to fulfill this task effectively. An earlier Canadian study by Brown (1977) found that counsellors expressed frustration with the lack of involvement in group methods, their level of

research involvement and their inability to participate in public relations activities. It was also discovered that counsellors and administrators/clients held different perceptions of the counsellor's role.

In another survey-based Canadian study designed to specifically investigate counsellors' current and ideal role with parents and family members, Samis, Allan & Echols (1993) found that elementary school counsellors from British Columbia maintain fairly traditional views of their role. Ideal functions that were identified by the respondents included: individual counselling, consultation with staff and other professionals and consultation with parents. Comparable results, in terms of ideal functions, were discovered by Hutchinson, Barrick & Groves (1986) in their study that included 56 school counsellors in Delaware County schools. Respondents within this study reported satisfaction in their primary counselling activities which included traditional student related counselling services.

The increased interest expressed by school counsellors in conducting group work (Hutchinson, Barrick & Groves, 1986; Morse & Russell, 1988) was also reflected in Carroll's (1993) survey of 95 elementary school counsellors in the State of Connecticut. In investigating how school counsellors perceived their roles, Carroll (1993) found that counsellors perceived themselves in the traditional roles of consultant, coordinator and counsellor. This study also showed that school counsellors desired more preparation in group work.

In a survey mailed to school counsellors in 666 of the excellent public schools identified by the United States Department of Education, Miller (1988) discovered that elementary school counsellors rated counselling and development higher than their counterparts in the middle schools or secondary schools. Secondary school

counsellors rated career assistance and educational planning higher than their counterparts in middle schools or elementary schools. Similar findings were found by Partin (1993) who surveyed 210 counsellors from various educational levels in Ohio to determine; (1) those activities that school counsellors perceived as their worst time wasters, (2) time allocation on specific functions and, (3) to compare ideal allocation of time among respondents. In general, results from this survey showed that counsellors would like to spend more time counselling and less time completing administrative and clerical duties. Elementary counsellors desired to spend more time in group counselling activities. Counsellors in the higher educational levels desired to have their time devoted to scheduling and administration decreased.

Schmidt & Osborne (1982) randomly sampled 100 elementary school counsellors in North Carolina to determine counsellor characteristics, situational factors and counselling/consulting activities. Results demonstrated that three of the four most frequently used activities included: individual counselling for personal concerns, individual counselling for academic concerns and group counselling for personal concerns. Consulting teachers was the second most frequent function of this group of elementary school counsellors. Findings from this research also indicated no significant change in the use of counselling over consulting activities since the 1960's. Thus, supporting earlier research suggesting that counselling activities were used more frequently by elementary school counsellors (e.g., Foster, 1967).

Hardesty & Dillard (1994) compared the roles of elementary school counsellors with middle and secondary school counsellors within Kentucky, three major

differences were discovered. The differences included: (1) elementary counsellors perform more consultative and coordination activities, (2) elementary counsellors may perform less administrative-like activities and, (3) middle and secondary school counsellors seem to work more on an individual basis with students and less with families.

To examine aspects of role and function of Minnesota secondary school counsellors, Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt & Williams (1989a, 1989b) surveyed 155 senior, junior and junior-senior high school counsellors. A synthesis of the results indicated that although there were some in-between group differences, overall there exists greater similarity than difference in the way the counselor groups perceived their function.

Counsellor Role as Perceived by Parents

The response of parents regarding school counsellor functions was sought by Miller (1989). After surveying parents from elementary schools in Minnesota, the results indicated that parents strongly supported 23 of the 28 functions and were mildly supportive of the other five. Results from a survey conducted in Connecticut by Helms & Ibrahim (1985) however, were not as favorable. In the final analysis, there were several discrepancies between how counsellors and parents perceived the role and function of the counsellor. Since parents rated public relations poorly, the researchers conclude by stating that in the age of accountability, counsellors need to seek input from their constituents when priorizing functions.

Counsellor Role as Perceived by Administrators

According to Hassard & Costar (1977) and Kaplan (1995) the different paradigms used by counsellors and principals, and a misunderstanding of each other's role, can lead to conflict between these two groups. More specifically, issues concerning confidentiality, student advocacy, discipline and the general climate of the school are frequently conceptualized much differently. Essentially, the role of the principal can be all encompassing and involves a myriad of responsibilities. The role of the counselor, for the most part, seems to be more focused on the overall mental health of students. Not surprisingly, Counselor-Principal Relationships was one of the six factors identified by Moracco & Gray (1983) on their Occupational Stress Inventory.

Despite the different perception that can arise between counsellors and principals regarding role definition, discrepancies might not be as significant as one might anticipate. An example is the study which was conducted by Bonebrake & Borgers (1984). These researchers surveyed 184 junior high, middle, and upper middle high principals and 212 junior high and middle school counsellors in Kansas to determine how the role of the counsellor was perceived. The results of this research indicated that there was considerable similarity in the rankings of counsellors and principals. The one category that was ranked first by both groups was individual counselling. Other areas that were highly ranked by both groups included: consultation with teachers, consultation with parents, coordination of assessment and evaluations. Miller (1989) also found that principals were strongly supportive of 24 of the 28 identified functions and were mildly supportive of the remaining four after surveying Minnesota elementary school principals to

determine what they thought about the relevance of elementary school guidance and counselling functions in their schools.

The latter studies however, can be contrasted with reports from Cormany & Brantley (1996). Using a personal interview format, these researchers discussed the role of the school counsellor with a prominent school superintendent from Pennsylvania. What emerged from this interview was the opinion that school counsellors had to become more involved in discipline, curriculum development, parental and teacher education, conflict resolution, student assistance programs, develop closer ties with business and industry, increase use of technology in the counselling context, and remain aware of the importance of parental retraining due to industrial downsizing. Furthermore, it was believed that the school counsellor needed to become aware of community resources, spend additional time in the classroom, and increase group counselling skills. After providing a litany of activities and responsibilities that were perceived as lacking, the interviewee concluded by saying that survival [italics added] is the greatest challenge facing school counsellors!

In a unique study, Hepburn (1986) used content analysis to analyze the reports written by principals regarding their counsellors in three British Columbia school districts. Results indicated that the top five functions and features included: relationships with students, staff consulting, personal counselling, counsellor attributes and extra curricular activities. The most significant finding was the discrepancy between the roles and functions of the counsellor as enunciated by their associations and the expectations of the school principals. What can be

inferred from this finding is that a shared process did not exist between counsellors and principals.

The criteria by which principals select school counsellors is also represented in the literature (e.g., Shack, 1978). Beale (1995), for example, presents an interesting study which outlines various factors that influence the hiring process. This study involved the review of employment applications from seven school districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The results of this study revealed that nonintellectual variables (personal interview, character references, recommendations, and professional experience) are given more weight than the intellectual variables such as grades and test scores. Despite minimal evidence correlating teaching experience with success as a counsellor (Baker, 1994; Olsen & Allen, 1993; Peterson & Brown, 1968), it appears that principals continue to value former classroom experience. Findings from this particular study is significant in that the school principal is regarded as the single most influential person in terms of school counsellor selection (Beale, 1995).

Fleming, Martin & Martin (1986) surveyed principals in western rural Illinois to examine their perceptions regarding elementary school counselling services. Results from this particular study were interesting in that few schools provided comprehensive school counselling services. Budget restraints were identified as the culprit. Feedback from the respondents indicated that the school counsellor should have a solid theoretical orientation, have knowledge of child development, be familiar with contemporary problems and be sensitive to the needs of children and parents. A willingness to put in extra time into community activities was also underscored. This aspect of the counsellor's role, otherwise known as boundary-

spanning, has been confirmed (Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner, 1985; Jerrell, 1984). In general, it appeared that the principals surveyed had little knowledge of the myriad of functions performed by school counsellors. As such, some were confused about the differences between school counsellors and social workers.

Miller (1986) surveyed guidance consultants in 50 states to identify important functions of the elementary and middle school counsellor. In terms of elementary school counsellors, several functions were identified and included: consultation with students, teachers and parents; organizing, administering, promoting and evaluating the guidance program, providing individual counselling. Important functions of middle school counsellors were very similar to their elementary counterparts but included small group counselling.

School Counsellor as Consultant

The consultative role of the school counsellor has received widespread attention in the literature (e.g., Doughtery, Doughtery & Purcell, 1991; Dustin & Burden, 1972; Faust, 1968; Franken, 1969; Fullmer & Bernard, 1972; Hume, 1970; Kaczkowski, 1967; Kranzler, 1969; Lewis, 1970; Lundquist & Chamley, 1971; Marchant, 1972; Nelson, 1967; Patterson, 1967; Schmidt & Medl, 1983). According to several authors (e.g., Dougherty, 1992; Dustin & Ehly, 1992; Reekie, 1992) school counsellors at all levels are being called on more frequently to provide consultation to parents, teachers, students and administrators. It has been suggested that school counsellors are ideal candidates to provide consultation due to their excellent training, skills and unique perspective on students, families and schools (Reekie, 1992). Faust (1975) went so far as suggesting that, "...each school should employ at least two counsellors: one for the roles of counseling and

consultation with children and one for consultation with teachers, parents, administrators and referral agencies" (p. 62). Although there are increasing needs in this area, it appears that there remains confusion associated with the parameters for consultative procedures and how consultation ultimately fits with other school counsellor responsibilities such as treatment and prevention (Brosseau, 1973; Kurpius & Rozecki, 1992; Mayer, Butterworth, Komoto & Benoit, 1983). Despite an early study by Schmidt & Osborne (1981) reporting no theoretical differences between counselling and consulting processes, the school counsellor's participation in the realm of consultation is considered unique by some. While providing an overview of various models of consultation, for example, Umansky & Holloway (1984), caution counsellors to be selective in how they interpret the task of consultation so to maximize the credibility of counselling. This cautionary note seems appropriate when considering that school counsellors, in general, may lack an adequate understanding of the consultative process (Male, 1982).

An early study by Splete (1975) that utilized the Critical Incident Technique to better understand the consultative functions of the elementary school counsellor revealed 233 incidents that were then grouped into nine areas of common concern. Primary functions included: contacts with individual pupils, contacts with groups of pupils and observations of pupils and teachers. In a final analysis it was reported that teachers welcomed and found the counsellor's assistance in understanding student behavior most helpful.

In working toward a productive consultative process, several models of consultation have been suggested (e.g., Chanow-Gruen & Doyle, 1983; Kavuk, 1988; Mickelson & Davis, 1977; Smaby, Harrison & Nelson, 1995). Deck (1992)

proposes that school counsellors should receive formal training and supervision in the delivery of consultative services within the school system. Consultative services typically range in scope and can include: performing in-services, helping manage a disruptive child, or designing a student wellness program. While supporting the earlier writings of Aubrey (1978), who predicted the growth of the school counsellor's consulting role, Dustin & Ehly (1992) underscore the challenge faced by school counsellors in obtaining the necessary consultative skills in order to meet the complexities they encounter on the job.

A specific model of consultation designed for elementary school counsellors, for example, is suggested by Smaby, Harrison & Nelson (1995). The Total Quality Management model is recommended in that it can be useful in assisting principals in the areas of interpersonal communication and administration while assisting schools address quality and consumer satisfaction.

The TET (Teacher Effectiveness Training) model was used by Chanow-Gruen & Doyle (1983) as an inservice classroom program for classroom teachers at a junior high school in New York. Essentially, the program was designed to enhance the teacher's skills in communication, human relationships, and problem solving. When comparing experimental and control groups, the former showed a statistically significant improvement.

In describing their three stage relationship-based model, Mickelson & Davis (1977) emphasize prevention opposed to remedial, crisis-oriented intervention. In presenting their perspective on consultation these authors provide three basic guidelines: (1) avoid trying to be a consultant with every teacher, (2) identify teachers who are cooperative and willing to participate in the consultative process

and, (3) concentrate efforts on cooperative teachers to increase the probability of success. Collaboration between the consultant and teacher is an inherent underpinning of this specific model with a focus on the teacher's interpersonal competencies and understanding of human behavior.

The Family Involvement Communication Systems (FICS) model expands the view of counsellor consultation (Shelton & Dobson, 1973). In doing so, this model encourages the counsellor to act as a trainer, coordinator and resource person for a wide variety of programs. It appears that the fundamental purpose is to involve parents through home visitations and the creation of parent rooms within the school (drop-in center), for example, while continually educating school personnel about guidance and counselling.

WORK RELATED ISSUES OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

Despite the involvement of school counsellors within educational programs, empirical investigation specific to the work related to this population remains sparse and is limited to: burn out (Boy & Pine, 1980; Kennedy, 1988; Moracco, Butcke, & McEwen, 1984; Tiedeman, 1979; Warnath & Shelton, 1976; Warnath, 1979), stress (Butcke, Moracco, & McEwen, 1984; Mott, 1975; Olson & Dilley, 1988; Parr, 1991; Sears & Navin, 1983), decay (Rubner & Zaffrann, 1975) and fatigue (Vestermark & Johnson, 1979). Moracco, Butcke & McEwen (1984) point out that very little information regarding work related issues of school counsellors is grounded in research, rather it is based on personal impressions. The absence of research has been attributed to the reluctance of these professionals to discuss the discomfort of their work in fear that their colleagues will ascribe this disclosure to personal inadequacies or professional deficiencies (Warnath, 1979).

School Counsellor Stress

Although school counsellor stress is discussed in the literature (e.g., Kremer & Owen, 1979; Olson & Dilley, 1988), empirical investigation pertaining to this phenomenon is limited to only a few studies (Sears & Navin, 1983; Butcke, Moracco & McEwen, 1984; Moracco, Butcke & McEwen, 1984). The purpose of the Sears and Navin (1983) study was to investigate self-reported school counsellor stress. It was assumed that counsellors were capable of providing accurate reports of the degree and sources of experienced stress.

The study involved the distribution of a questionnaire to school counsellors who were attending two guidance conventions in Ohio. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section requested demographic data. The second section consisted of 40 specific situations generally experienced by school counsellors in their work place. These situations were derived from an earlier study (Sears & Navin, 1981). Results from this study indicated that 50% of the counsellors sampled reported counselling to be moderately stressful [italics added] while 14% regarded counselling to be very stressful [italics added]. Three areas of counsellor stress were identified from this study and included: quantitative overload (e.g., insufficient time to see students, excessive case load), role conflict (e.g., too many secretarial duties, too much paper work) and role ambiguity (e.g., lack of colleagues' clarity regarding counsellor role). Acknowledged limitations of this study pertained to the questionable accuracy of self-reported measures and the generalizability of the study's sample.

The study conducted by Moracco, Butcke & McEwen (1984) involved the random sampling of 550 counsellors and the Counsellor Occupational Stress

Inventory (COSI) was utilized in an attempt to identify stress factors. In addition, "...this study attempted to investigate the relationship of certain characteristics of school counsellors to their perceptions of stress" (Moracco, Butcke & McEwen, 1984, p. 111). The characteristics that were considered included: age, years of experience, school size, sex, type of school, school setting and career evaluation.

Results from this study indicated that occupational stress was perceived as multidimensional and is comprised of six major factors that included: (1) lack of decision making authority, (2) financial stress, (3) responsibility for extraneous duties, (4) professional job overload, (5) relationship with teachers and, (6) relationships with principals. In a similar study, Butcke, Moracco & McEwen (1984) used the Teacher Occupational Stress Questionnaire and surveyed randomly selected counsellors. Modifications of the questionnaire were made to accommodate the counselling profession.

Kremer & Owen (1979) assert that, "Sources of stress in the life of the school counselor are without limit" (p. 43). While focusing primarily on methods by which to manage stress, these authors provide an extensive list of stressful events which are categorized into the areas of: (1) harm or loss, (2) anticipatory threat and, (3) challenge. These authors concede that their list is by no means exhaustive and is meant to provide a sense of potentially stressful situations. Due to their unique circumstances, stressful events identified by rural counsellors include: (1) being over-worked, (2) having additional responsibilities, (3) inadequate time to complete tasks and, (4) lack of referral sources (Sutton & Southworth, 1990).

School Counsellor Burnout

The phenomenon of school counsellor burnout has received some attention in the literature (Boy & Pine, 1980; Tiedeman, 1979; Warnath, 1979). Warnath & Shelton (1976) for example, punctuate the discrepancy between graduate school idealism and on-the-job reality as a leading factor in counsellor burnout. Based on their personal experience, these authors note the difference of interest in providing direct counselling services that exists between young (one to four years experience) counsellors and those with ten or more years of experience.

School Counsellor Fatigue

The early work of Vestermark & Johnson (1970) suggested that counsellor fatigue develops cumulatively and subtly and that early signs of fatigue are rarely acted upon. According to these authors, indicators of counsellor fatigue include: inability to relax, lack of humor and a general lethargy. In terms of the counselling context, other faintly disturbing signals might include: feeling distracted during interviews, lack of interest in clients and a growing impatience in the counselling process.

Vestermark and Johnson (1970) attribute counsellor fatigue to the inability to establish effective boundaries and eventual overload. These authors state:

> As fatigue settles in, a counselor is likely to become more irritable, more harried, and less effective, even as he drives himself to regain his usual level of competence. An uneasy feeling of being off balance may lead the counselor to question his own abilities. (p. 107)

School Counsellor Decay

In addition to providing examples of decay situations within a guidance department, Rubner & Zaffrann (1975) suggest that underpinning such decay are, "...circumstances that inhibit realization of the goals of a guidance department" (p. 132). To prevent the deterioration of effective counsellor functioning and overall guidance services, these authors have designed the Decay Fighter Worksheet. This worksheet involves: (1) identification and priorization of decay situations, (2) identification of the effects of decay situations on students, staff and administration, (3) personal assessment of decay situations on self, (4) assessment of personal contribution to decay situation, (5) personal contribution to the amelioration of decay situations, (6) substitution of a more favorable situation, (7) assessment of objective viability and, (8) possible modes of implementing selected objective.

School Counsellor Critical Incident Reports

Neely & Iburg (1989) used the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986) to elicit problems encountered by high school counsellors (grades 7-12) and the response intent of these professionals. Through the use of the Critical Incident Questionnaire, a group of counsellors stratified by location were asked to briefly describe a critical incident and rate it on a seven point likert scale. The reported critical incidents were then classified into Hill's List of Intentions (Hill & O'Grady, 1985). Results indicated that the counsellors primarily had the following intentions: (1) get more information, (2) give support, (3) explore feelings and, (4) challenge client to look at alternatives. When working with learning disabled clients the counsellors main intentions were to: (1) clarify, (2)

support, (3) get information and, (4) explore feelings. Neely & Iburg (1989) suggest that this small exploratory study hints at some of the client problems (vocational, academic or personal) counsellors find most difficult.

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986), has also been used (Gora, Sawatzky & Hague, 1992; Gora & Hague, 1990) to directly involve Alberta school counsellors in evaluating their effectiveness. Results indicate that participants of this study perceive their major role as student counselling, consultation with parents and other school personnel. In terms of critical incidents, issues around family problems and school problems were most prevalent.

THE RURAL SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

Although ruralness is not an unusual topic within education programs, it seems that counsellor education programs have avoided researching this issue (e.g., Jeffery, Lehr, Hache & Campbell, 1992; Sutton, Southworth & Pearson, 1990). Unfortunately, this trend seems to be historical as noted by DeBlassie & Ludeman (1973) who, after conducting an extensive literature search, could only locate three textbooks which focused on guidance services within the rural area. Sutton (1988) reports that school counsellors appear to be set apart by their unique training and responsibilities and by the small school populations they serve. In describing counselling in isolated areas, Furlong (1980) writes:

> For example, counsellors working in a sparsely populated rural community in the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland, need more than an aptitude for a helping profession [italics original]. They need reserves of tact, patience, empathy, ingenuity, and

> tolerance for different ways of life. In a rural community it seems that the job of a guidance counsellor is much more caught up with the life of the community and consequently much more demanding than it is in urban centers p. 42

As indicated by Sutton, Southworth & Pearson (1990) literature pertaining specifically to rural school counselling continues to be sparse. On a more positive note however, incremental efforts to provide greater exposure to counselling in the rural school are evident through special journal issues and the establishment of two American based journals and an American based association devoted to this topic (e.g., Helge, 1984; Heyman; 1986; Hughes & Fagan, 1985; Sutton, 1988; Sutton, Southworth & Pearson, 1990).

In reviewing the literature, several prominent issues which tend to directly influence the counsellor emerged and are discussed below.

Isolation

Isolation may be experienced by the rural school counsellor on both a personal and professional level. Sutton (1988) reports that counsellor anxiety regarding their isolation may bring on increased isolation whereas fear might cause the counsellor to extend himself or herself to others. Sutton & Southworth (1985) and Sutton (1988) also report that more women than men emphasize the importance of family and friends when working as a rural school counsellor. With a significantly smaller number of peers with whom to interact, the lack of a natural support system can leave the counsellor coping with feelings of loneliness.

The mere distance, poor roads and hazardous terrain between the rural community and larger urban center are seen as obstacles (McLeskey, Huebner &

Cummings, 1984) and can limit the professional's accessibility and ability to participate in various social activities. Consequently, rural counsellors may have a thinner social support network in contrast to their urban counterparts. Helge (1981) reports that a greater percentage of professionals leave special education positions due to social and professional growth limitations rather than incompetence.

The difficulty experienced by the school counsellor in fitting into the rural community may also lead to a sense of isolation (Murray, 1984). This particular dilemma has been referred to as, a stranger in a strange land [italics added] (Benson, Hanson & Canfield, 1982). Huebner & Huberty (1984) report that professionals from urban backgrounds who move into a rural setting, "...often experience culture shock [italics original] and have been reported as likely to leave at the first chance" (p. 97). This phenomenon may be further exacerbated as the professional works toward gaining entrance into the rural school system. Under these circumstances the school counsellor is faced with having to perform his or her professional functions while simultaneously having to gain the credibility of colleagues, administration and parents.

Earlier findings by Sutton (1988) are supported by McIntire, Marion, and Quaglia (1990) who state that, "...rural guidance professionals are often the only trained counselors in their schools and even in their districts" (p. 169). The professional isolation experienced by guidance professionals therefore, presents unique challenges and directly affects who applies, who is hired and retained. There appears to be a combination of physical and psychological isolation within the rural areas which includes working behind closed doors in the counselling

context and by virtue of specific training and the way the counselling job is performed (Sutton, 1988).

The issue of professional isolation has also presented challenges to the profession of school psychology (Murray & Keller, 1991). Huebner & Huberty (1984) and McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings (1984), for example, contend that the long distances that separate rural professionals from their urban colleagues preclude consistent communication, stimulation and support. The lack of appropriate supervision may also become an issue of concern. This issue is underscored by McIntire, Marion & Quaglia (1990) who report, "In fact, supervisors or mentors trained in guidance are extremely rare in rural systems and most often a principal or superintendent is the counselor's direct supervisor" (p. 170). Sutton & Southworth (1990) discovered that 90% of all school counsellors in Maine were supervised by their principal or some other administrator. Not surprisingly, studies pertaining to school psychologists indicate that attrition rates for rural school psychologists are exceptionally high (Helge, 1981, 1984).

The problem of burnout due to professional isolation, coupled with excessive responsibility, is a concern among rural-based school counsellors. This concern becomes heightened based on Matthes' (as cited in McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1990) findings which indicated that rural counsellors were the least likely to receive help in resolving issues. In a study conducted by Matthes (as cited in McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1990) rural counsellors were almost four years younger than their suburban colleagues and almost seven years younger than their urban colleagues. The age differences also translated into similar differences in professional experience. This study also showed that 85% of rural counsellors

were women compared to 12.5% who were working in urban districts. The larger number of women working as school counsellors suggests that female counsellors are more comfortable in the rural setting. Their adaptability might also be attributed to their ability to seek support from colleagues and other educators (McIntire, Marion, & Quaglia, 1990).

To combat isolation and burnout (Huebner & Huberty, 1984) several strategies have been recommended by James (1990) who suggests several measures that include: (1) interface with university staff, (2) consult with administration and colleagues, (3) participate as a practicum student supervisor, (4) engage in the area of publishing, (5) attend and present at professional conferences, (6) network with colleagues from surrounding areas, (7) connect with the local department of education and, (8) establish electronic linkages with colleagues. Along the same lines, it has been recommended that rural counsellors identify and develop their own support systems (McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1990) while learning to network and collaborate with colleagues and other professionals (Braucht & Weime, 1990). This latter point is emphasized by DeBlassie & Ludeman (1973) who write:

> ...most small or rural, school counselors typically have little opportunity to exchange ideas with other counselors or professionals and have little or no access to the means for professional growth, particularly in terms of what is happening in the field currently. p. 2

As described by Lund (1990) the element of trust also permeates collegial relationships. As a result, it becomes incumbent upon the counsellor to remain

open and receptive while working toward gaining the respect and trust of colleagues.

Despite the negatives associated with rural school counselling however, there are also many positive features as described by McIntire, Marion & Quaglia (1990) who view the rural school as an open system. Positive features available within rural schools include: the freedom of the school counsellor to design programs, less bureaucracy and formality, emphasis on quality not quantity, greater collaboration with peers and administration, slower pace and less pressure and community cooperation (Sutton & Southworth, 1990) and being highly valued (Sutton, 1988). Sutton & Southworth's study (1990) pointed out that as a result of professional isolation, counsellors and administrators tended to rely upon each other and exchanged more ideas. Subsequently, they felt more positive about their relationship than their urban counterparts. Lund (1990) nevertheless, cautions against assuming that the rural school administrator fully understands the role of the school counsellor.

Community Resources

Helge (1985, 1984) provides a comprehensive overview of issues differentiating rural and nonrural school systems and highlights: school population served, personnel turnover, transportation, community structure, geography, backlog for student testing and placement, communication, approach of educators, community agency cooperation, student body composition, management style, population density and enrollment of school aged children. In citing an American report, Helge (1985) contends that, "...rural children and their families are characteristically unserved or underserved by non-school health and mental health

professionals" (p. 409). The long distances rural families have to travel for services is identified as a major roadblock to service delivery.

Sutton (1988) and Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner (1985) accentuate the fact that the rural counsellor rarely has the option of referring a problem to a myriad of helping professionals. As such, he or she, ..."must be a creative problem solver, able to intervene from a variety of service delivery standpoints (direct and indirect) to help provide children with appropriate services under less than optimal conditions" (Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner, 1985, p. 431). The ability to function as a generalist [italics added] appears to be a requirement for the rural counsellor (Hargrove, 1982). Murray (1984) comments, "...rural work may require flexible responsiveness to community needs and a willingness to tackle a problem that is ecologically ripe [italics original] rather than to doggedly persist in one's own favorite arena" (p. 229).

Community Pressures

Allen & James (1990) and Siegel (1969) emphasize trust as a key value in the rural community. Similarly, Helge (1985) remarks, "The deeply ingrained rural ethos of self-help [italics original] and suspicion of outsiders (e.g., itinerant psychologists) frequently culminate in lack of family interest or involvement in psychological services. Even more unfortunate, parental approval is frequently denied" (p. 409). The difficulty for professional helpers to negotiate entry into the system and affect change has also been punctuated by McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings (1984). As such, the school counsellor must be seen as an integral part of the community and demonstrate commitment beyond the boundaries of the school. While participating in boundary spanning activities (Cummings, McLeskey

& Huebner, 1985; Jerrell, 1984), the counsellor becomes more visible and establishes trust within the community. Although there are potential disadvantages as well as advantages to performing community-oriented functions (Jerrell, 1984), becoming involved in the community provided the professional with an opportunity to become involved in systems other than just the school. According to Hughes & Spense (cited in DeBlassie & Ludeman, 1975) small towns and rural areas have historically valued control over its institutions and the rural school is a primary source of community pride and identity (Gotts & Purnell, 1986; McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1990). Cody (1983) states, "In many rural communities the public school remains the center for cultural enrichment. Students come from a variety of small communities, ranches and farms. The public schools by their very nature must interact with this broad-based constituency" (p. 2).

Huebner & Huberty (1984) claim that some school psychology practitioners have described living and practicing in the rural area as analogous to living in a fish bowl [italics added]. Common problems associated with this arrangement include: dealing with clients in multiple and overlapping relationships and the increased possibility of conflict between professional and personal roles, less tolerance on the part of the community toward any deviance in the professional's behavior and an increased level of tolerance and acceptance expected of the professional. Such constant visibility and pressures are considered factors that attribute to burnout (Huebner & Huberty, 1984).

Accordingly, the professionals who are employed within smaller communities are therefore more vulnerable to community pressures and observations from their constituents. Contextual differences that exist between rural and urban schools,

and which directly impact school counsellors have received some attention in the literature (e.g., Allen & James, 1990; Braucht & Weime, 1990; Cody, 1983; Keys, Jacobs & Celotta, 1990; Saba, 1991). In order to function within the rural community, it is imperative that the professional gain an understanding of the social environment and work effectively within the social milieu (Furlong, 1980). Helge (1985) suggests that newcomers to the rural area generally do not understand local communication and power structures. It has been further suggested, that the professional's lack of preparation for the rural lifestyle can culminate in culture shock and elevated rates of attrition (Marrs, 1984). Despite universities becoming increasingly aware of the acute problems their graduates are experiencing, Sutton & Southworth (1990) contend that little attention has been paid to preparing school counsellors for the rural setting. A similar concern has been echoed in the area of school psychology (e.g., Human & Wasem, 1991; Hutner & Windle, 1991: Keller, Murray, Hargrove & Dengerink, 1983; Murray, 1984).

Quality of Education

As noted by Froelich (1950), "...small schools cannot pass off their responsibility by glib statements about the lack of money, staff, or other resources. Nor can they escape the task of providing for the needs by claiming smallness an insurmountable obstacle" (p.3). In highlighting educational advantages of the smaller school, DeBlassie & Ludeman (1950) include: the ability of faculty to become well acquainted with students and their personal needs, close ties with community resources, better functioning of the smaller school population, relative stability of the student body and finally, generally young, flexible and adaptable

colleagues. This latter aspect of the smaller school has also been reinforced by McIntire, Marion & Quaglia (1990). Helge (1985) however, underscores the high attrition rates among young professionals and the implications this can have on program stability.

RURAL SCHOOL COUNSELLING IN CANADA

Although school counselling in Canada remains innovative and has received substantial attention (e.g., Alberta Education, 1995a, 1995b, 1994a, 1994b; Brown, 1980, 1974a, 1974b, 1974c; Carreiro & Schulz, 1988, 1987; Furlong, 1980; Gora & Hague, 1990; Gora, Sawatzky & Hague, 1992; Harvey, 1978; Samis, Allan & Echols, 1993) rural school counselling has not enjoyed the same attention. Aside from a few articles (e.g., Furlong, 1980; Pinsent, 1984) little attention has been devoted to rural school counselling in Canada. Current research literature regarding rural school counselling in Canada is limited to two published studies by Emerson (1984) and Jeffery, Lehr, Hache & Campbell (1992). Regarding Canadian counsellor-training programs, Jeffery, Lehr, Hache & Campbell (1992) assert, "Developers of counsellor-training programs and institutions offering counsellor training have simply not taken into account the rural situation and the needs of counsellors who will work in these settings" (p. 253). Although limited, the available literature concerning rural school counselling in Canada is of value and is discussed below.

In his study, Emerson (1984) used a self-report format and surveyed 75 superintendents, 200 elementary school parents, 80 teachers, 4 principals and students from a small rural school district in British Columbia, Canada to determine the types of counselling programs and level of service. Both qualitative

and quantitative data were analyzed and focused on the perceptions of needs assessments and possible inroads for improvement in service delivery. In the final analysis, superintendents indicated a wide range of types and levels of services offered by school districts, parents were very supportive of the need for school counselling in order to help their children develop academically and socially, teachers punctuated the importance of school counsellors in the areas of consultation and specific classroom discussion facilitation. Student responses indicated no clear need for an over-all elementary school counselling program. Emerson (1984) points out that this latter outcome is not surprising when considering that the students surveyed had only experienced academically related school professionals. In addition, the students surveyed had rarely been asked to assess their own needs.

Cahill & Martland (1993) specifically address the issue of career counselling in rural schools. These authors support an earlier claim made by Furlong (1980) in contending that school counsellors working in rural areas face issues that their urban counterparts never have to consider. In addition to the practical issues of distance and scattered population, the challenge of relating mainstream career counselling programs to students living outside the urban-industrial culture is highlighted. Because rural dwellers develop perspectives that are different from those who are raised in the urban center, Cahill & Martland (1993) remark that counsellors must remain sensitive to these differences and how they influence life decisions. To adequately address the career needs of the rural student, importance is placed on several factors which include: (1) the meaning of work, (2) a specialized versus generalist skill base, (3) geographical preference versus mobility,

(4) occupational change and, finally (5) career skills. In conclusion, these authors emphasize the need for rural counsellors to appreciate the importance their students place on community while keeping abreast with changes within rural society.

A focus on career development among rural students, albeit in terms of parental involvement, was also the topic of a study completed by Jeffery, Lehr, Hache & Campbell (1992). These authors used a modified version of the Delphi method and collected information regarding career-related concerns, problems and activities along with useful suggestions in rural Newfoundland. Co-researchers included parents, community members and students. The research data indicated that in order for parents of rural-based students to be helpful in terms of career development they needed information tailored to their situation. According to these authors current career information packages and support carry what might be termed an urban assumption [italics added]. Although there is a wealth of information on careers, apparently parents within the rural area are without immediate access to this material. To ameliorate this situation, several recommendations were made and included: (1) the organization of local discussion groups, (2) the use of tele-conferencing with distant counsellors, (3) making video/audio tapes and printed material more available to parents and, (4) the establishment of a Mail-order or 1-800 line.

The challenge of professional development among rural school counsellors is discussed by Pinsent (1984). To avoid professional isolation, and to remain current, Pinsent (1984) underscores the need for personal and financial commitment to continued learning and the willingness to incorporate new

information through experimentation. Programs such as: summer school course, correspondence, in-service training, professional workshops and consultation with colleagues are suggested as ways to enhance professional skills while remaining connected with the larger school counselling community.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

To reiterate briefly, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of the rural school counsellor. A qualitative research design was chosen in order to focus on counsellors' experiences. A phenomenological orientation was deemed appropriate in order to focus primarily on the meaning of the experiences of the co-researchers. The research process followed the methodological guidelines proposed by Colaizzi (1978) and Osborne (1990) to collect and analyze the data.

This chapter is divided into two sections: research design and research procedures. In the research design section, the phenomenological orientation used is described. The procedures section includes: rationale for the phenomenological orientation, setting and context, selection of co-researchers, ethical considerations, interview format and a detailed discussion pertaining to the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

Descriptive Phenomenology: Research Design Orientation

Osborne (1990) has suggested that there is no such thing as a phenomenological method. In his view, phenomenology is more of an orientation rather than a specific approach itself. Parker (1994) asserts, "The underlying philosophy of phenomenology inhibits formulation of a specific methodology. Phenomenological research is a dynamic process in which strict methods would be a contradiction to the phenomenological philosophy" (p. 6). This perspective is

shared by Donalek (1994) and Colaizzi (1978) who affirm that phenomenology can be conducted in many different ways. In providing further clarification, Kvale (1996) posits, "Philosophy addresses the conditions for knowledge of the human situation; it does not provide specific methods for obtaining empirical knowledge of the human situation" (p. 57). It is generally agreed that the structure and order of meaning are difficult to describe therefore, the purpose of phenomenological research is to generate clear, systematic and precise descriptions of the meaning of the experience (Polkinghorne, 1983). In supporting a descriptive approach within a phenomenological orientation, Giorgi (1992) argues that description clarifies the meaning of the objects of experience exactly as they are experienced. Consequently, "Whatever shows up is described precisely as it shows itself" (Giorgi, 1992, p. 127).

Ray (1990) reports that the phenomenological movement primarily comprises of three historical phases: preparatory, German and French. During the preparatory phase, phenomenological inquiry first appeared in the writings of the philosopher Brentano in the latter part of the19th century. The German phase developed in the early part of the 20th century, and phenomenology was further developed by Edmund Husserl. During the French phase, philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Marcel, expanded the philosophical principles and methodical procedures of phenomenology.

Descriptive phenomenology however, is primarily associated with the foundational writings of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1970, 1973), who is considered the father of the phenomenologic movement. According to Cohen & Omery (1994), Husserl began to redirect his work in phenomenology

following the death of his son in World War I. In recounting his life, Stewart & Mickunas (1990) described the hardships Husserl encountered in his later life due to his Jewish ancestry. With libraries closed to him, "... he was able to continue his work only because his students braved the possibility of Nazi reprisals by bringing him books" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 11). Following Husserl's death, his valuable works were preserved by his closest associates and German nuns who realized the intention of the Nazis to destroy every vestige of Jewish scholarship. Following the war, Husserl archives were set up at the University of Louvain.

Cohen & Omery (1994) outline four constants through Husserl's philosophy which are summarized here. First, was the ideal of rigorous science [italics added]. Husserl was very determined and persistent in his effort to move philosophy to a direction whereby there would be a restoration of contact with the deeper concerns of people. Second, was philosophic radicalism [italics added]. Believing that human experience had a meaningful structure, Husserl's epistemology involved the study of essential structures and his descriptive phenomenology sought universal essences, their structure and relations founded on bracketing. Fourth, was the ethos of radical autonomy [italics added]. Husserl was of the belief that people were personally responsible for self and their culture. Finally, there was the respect for wonders [italics added] and the awareness of self and others. Related to this latter point, Ray (1990) posits that the phenomenologist develops a mindful wonder and, "...one must know and understand self first before entering into the lifeworld of another" (p. 175). Due to Husserl's passion and belief that science needed to restore its contact with deeper human issues, his interest was ultimately in going to the roots of all knowledge.

Inherent in phenomenological research is a focus on the lifeworld [italics added]. Stewart & Mickunas (1990) report that the lived world (world of ordinary and immediate experience) was always in the background of Husserl's work. As noted by Giorgi (1975) the lifeworld refers to the everyday world as it is lived by all of us prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind. Included in the lifeworld are: emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy and other subjective aspects associated with the natural evolution of an individual's life (Berg, 1989). The life world of an individual encompasses his or her physical and affective experiences and the meanings derived from such experiences. As such, phenomenological research searches for a deeper understanding and insightful descriptions of everyday experiences. It is interested in the primacy of lived experience and invites co-researchers to share their own experiences and respond in their own way. Jardine (1990) elaborates on phenomenological inquiry and writes, "It brings inquiry out from under the desire for the final Word; it opens us up for the re-birth and re-enlivening of the Word in the soul, with the full richness and ambiguity that such re-enlivening requires" (p. 221). Husserl considered the uncovering of meaning through self reflection by returning to the things themselves [italics added]: the person's descriptions of everyday lived experience as the primary objective of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Phenomenology attempts to establish a renewed contact with original experience and involves re-learning and re-discovering the basic experience of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) claims that phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld and emphasizes our immediate experience to it pre-reflectively rather than after our conceptualization

and categorization. As a result, the lifeworld is of primary significance in working toward understanding the inner experiences of school counsellors. Toward this end, I attempted to uncover, understand and present the essential structure of their experiences.

Husserl presented phenomenology as an epistemology, theory of knowledge - How do human beings know? (Polkinghorne, 1983; Ray, 1990). Consequently, he developed the basis for a philosophy that describes the meaning structures of the human experience. Moustakas (1994) writes, "Husserl's phenomenology is a Transcendental Phenomenology. It emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of experience and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge" (p. 43). This form of research involves the study of lived experiences and aims at gathering a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). In phenomenological research there is a refocus on descriptions of experiences as opposed to a description of worldly objects (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1983). Ray (1990) notes, " In short, Husserl believed that ideas that order and give form to experience create our lived experience" (p. 174). As evident in the previous chapter, research regarding school counsellors is limited to surveys that tend to provide numerical data. Baker (1995) further asserts that such information is often about parts of a larger phenomenon. Therefore, to discover a more holistic perspective regarding the school counsellor, phenomenology is essential. Through this orientation, the multiple modes of awareness of the counsellor can be considered. Within this study, rural school counsellors' lived world is viewed from a vantage point in which their experiences constitute knowledge and perspectives

through meanings that evolve from their experiences.

In pursuit of the deep structure of meaning, phenomenologists strive to elucidate the general essence of the phenomenon being investigated in order to yield a concrete descriptive analysis. Within this process, the researcher distinguishes significant features of the experience and presents a perspectival understanding of the phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). For the purpose of clarification, essence should not be considered a discovery, but rather a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) further notes that a good description of an essence is achieved when the structure of the lived experience is revealed in such a way that it can be understood in a novel manner. Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes phenomenology as the study of essences and suggests that it is a philosophy devoted to putting essences back into existence. From his perspective, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences. Merleau-Ponty (1962) goes on to say that phenomenology can be identified and practiced as a style of thinking [italics added] and that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy. During phenomenological research, the descriptions of lived experiences are analyzed in order to uncover the structures of experience constituted in consciousness [italics added]. van Manen (1990) remarks that consciousness is transitive and is the only access human beings have to the world. Access to these structures of experience therefore, provides information about the ways in which we are cognizant of and constitute knowledge in consciousness (Reeder, 1988). According to Stewart & Mickunas (1990) the aim of phenomenology is, "... turning to the content of consciousness itself - to the phenomena - and to see

philosophy's task as being that of describing the essences of phenomena [italics original], the explication of the various levels of meaning of phenomena, and their interrelationships" (p. 8). Fundamentally, phenomenology is a systematic investigation of the content of consciousness which seeks the basis of human knowledge. To accomplish this, Husserl called for a return to the things themselves [italics added]. As noted by Stewart & Mickunas (1990) when speaking of things [italics added], Husserl was referring to phenomena, that is, anything of which one is conscious. Husserl proposed that all forms of knowledge are based in consciousness; a consciousness that is intentional, a consciousness of something.

Within phenomenology, consciousness is considered intentional [italics added] in that experience is always an experience of something (Polkinghorne, 1983). Conscious acts to bring together its objects (noemata) into various activities (noeses) in an interactive manner. Husserl proposed that meaning emerged from perception, the original mode of awareness. As noted by Merleau-Ponty (1962) phenomenology is not limited to the senses, and can include intuiting, imagining, anticipating and remembering. Such a variety of awareness modes provides greater evidence of the world. Husserl's concept of originary pertains to an intentional experience structured by an individual who lives it and is cognizant of it. Moustakas (1994) remarks, "Intentionality refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related" (p. 28). Intentionality is the connectedness of humans to the world. Remaining aware of intentionality therefore, requires that we remain present to ourselves and to the things in the

world. Stated differently, intentionality means directedness toward an object (Cohen & Omery, 1994) and marks the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world. Intentionality or intentional consciousness involves the past (retentions), future (protentions) and the present (current moment) (Reeder, 1984) and integrates the experience of self in the life-world (Natanson, 1973). Consequently, there is a connection between the conscious mind and that of which it is conscious, the knower and the known are one (Reeder, 1984). Stewart & Mickunas (1990) state that Husserl considered intentionality as an activity of consciousness rather than a causal relationship to objects. Husserl said that each experience (cogitatio) consisted of two sides: the cogito (the act of experiencing) and the cogitatum (that which is experienced). Again, because the intentional structure of consciousness suggests that all thinking is directed toward something, then every cogito intends a cogitatum. By de-emphasizing the question of the reality of the world to its meaning as phenomenon, phenomenology highlights the unity between the two poles of the cogito and the cogitatum. The intentionality of consciousness effectively moves the focus away from the question of reality with a focus then on meaning to what appears conscious. As noted by Stewart & Mickunas (1990) phenomenology bridges consciousness and its content by illustrating the impossibility of making a radical distinction between them.

At this juncture, the importance of bracketing [italics added] becomes evident. As witnessed in the literature, phenomenological reduction, epoche and bracketing are synonymous and describe the change of attitude which is necessary for philosophical inquiry. The Greek term epoche [italics added] was used by Husserl for the phenomenological reduction (Fouche, 1984). According to Cohen &

Omery (1994) Husserl also used the mathematical metaphor of bracketing when referring to the suspension of beliefs. Within the phenomenological orientation, the researcher attempts to suspend all judgments until they can be founded on a more certain basis. This suspension of the natural attitude [italics added] was labelled by Husserl as the phenomenological epoche and, "...gives philosophy a starting point free from the presuppositions which mask hidden assumptions about the nature of reality" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 7). In other words, we cannot speak about the nature of reality without first referring to our own experience of reality. Bracketing is an important concept in qualitative research and involves the process of self-reflection on the part of the researcher. Beck (1996) elaborates:

> Bracketing is crucial to the success of phenomenological research. In bracketing, the researcher's beliefs about the phenomenon under study are first made explicit. Next, these beliefs are set aside or suspended temporarily so that the phenomenon can come into view, instead of being distorted by preconceptions. Bracketing enables researchers to interview participants and analyze data without trying to confirm their own presuppositions. p. 99

Consequently, the researcher reduces a complex problem to its fundamental elements by disregarding the superfluous. Through this narrowing process, he or she is better able to understand the phenomena under investigation. The philosophical stance assumed in this study acknowledges that the subjective and perspectival nature of reality and that knowledge stems from one's perspective of experience.

Spiegelberg (1982) notes that bracketing involves two stages. The first stage, eidetic reduction [italics added] involves reducing particular facts to general essences (eidos). Eidos, the Greek word for idea, is the essence of what a thing [italics added] is. The second stage, phenomenological reduction proper [italics added] allows, "...phenomena to come directly into view, rather than to be viewed (and distorted) through our preconceptions because we temporarily suspend the natural standpoint (or natural attitude)" (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 139). Although the goal of phenomenological research is presuppositionless description, the existence of the researcher's biases cannot be eliminated completely (van Manen, 1990). To further explain this latter point, Stewart & Mickunas (1990) remind us that mathematical equations which are bracketed are not eliminated but are simply removed from the question for the present so that the larger context of the equation can be examined.

The passion that underlies one's research has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of a personally meaningful topic include the motivation of the investigator to immerse himself or herself into the question being posed and the opportunity to draw on one's own personal experiences in relation to the co-researcher's experience. A potential disadvantage to a personally meaningful topic is a researcher's foreknowledge of a particular phenomenon and his or her prior bias. The risk, of course, is that the researcher hears what is expected rather than the co-researcher's actual experience. To augment this process, Colaizzi (1978) suggests that researchers reflect on pertinent questions in order to explicate their personal positions regarding the phenomenon being studied. The purpose of explicating a personal interest in the phenomenon is to

provide a framework with which to assess the validity of data analysis and interpretations (Wertz, 1986). In the process of bracketing, the researcher attempts to distance himself or herself from previously held theories and assumptions. By doing so, he or she does not rely on established theories but rather, focuses on the immediate experience of the phenomenon being studied.

The basic structure of consciousness is revealed as the phenomenon is analyzed. Ihde (1977) suggests that phenomenological inquiry does not stop when particularities are revealed but rather, there needs to be further search for essential features (essences) of the phenomenon. In doing so, there is then a connection and unity between particularity and universality. van Manen (1990) reminds us that although phenomenological inquiry recognizes the subjective nature of experience, the intent is to uncover experiences which contain essential elements shared by many. As such, the phenomenologist does not seek universal laws that propel behavior but, subjective experiences which mediate behavior. Thus, by gaining insight into individual experiences we can begin to appreciate both the commonality and the uniqueness of human behavior. In short, the essence constitutes the structure of the experience.

Basic to phenomenology is the reciprocity between the world and consciousness. This is to say, that the world has no meaning apart from consciousness and accordingly, consciousness has no meaning apart from the world. This reciprocal relationship was referred to by Husserl as a process of constitution. The concept of constitution simply means that we cannot experience something by merely perceiving it. Experience involves a host of different phases such as perception, expectation, retention, memory and so on. Therefore, only

through these experiences will the thing [italics added] become apparent. On a practical level, a phenomenological description of experience can uncover the various levels that comprise the experience. What becomes important during this process is the unification of these levels. In other words, each level is not an isolated impression but a part of a larger experience. Through a phenomenological lens, Polkinghorne (1983) states that through our consciousness we experience various worldly objects which eventually constitute our awareness. At a deeper level phenomenology challenges the traditional approach of separating mind and body into two different spheres. It is in this state of awareness wherein objects appear as something. As such, "...experience occurs at the meeting of the person and world" (p. 42). Experiences themselves are made up of both the actual occurrence and the meaning associated with these occurrences. Consequently, phenomenological inquiry focuses on the description of the eidos or structure of these experiences. Within this process, there is an attempt to grasp [italics added] or enter into eidetic seeing [italics added] in order to investigate the conscious or essential structures.

This study used a method based on the work of other phenomenologically oriented researchers (Colaizzi, 1978; Osborne, 1990; Giorgi, 1970, 1975) for abstracting themes from co-researchers' descriptions to understand the essential structure of their experience. Phenomenological research often involves a re-spiralling process thus, producing a recursive pattern of data gathering, interpretation, dependability, modification and further data gathering as co-researchers and researcher interact. Once themes have been organized into higher order clusters, a description of the fundamental structures underlying the

experience is provided. According to Polkinghorne (1983) it is then the responsibility of the researcher to reveal and unravel the structures, logic and interrelationships and ultimately, describe the essential features of the experience under study.

Interpretation of Shared Stories

The interpretive process cannot be denied within descriptive phenomenology. As noted by van Manen (1990), "Actually, it has been argued that all description is ultimately interpretation (p. 25). In making this claim, van Manen (1990) affirms a distinction made by Gadamer (1986) who suggested that interpretation in its original meaning referred to a pointing to something [italics added] versus a pointing out something [italics added]. In the former sense, the interpretive process does not confront something or read into some meaning but rather, reveals what, "...the thing itself points to" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 68).

As meaningful stories are shared, there is an ongoing process involving language and the interpretation of language. As such, the phenomenological text is interpretative in that it mediates (van Manen, 1990). Consequently, researchers are not outside [italics added] the research dialogue but rather integrally entwined. As noted by Varela (1984) there is no method which can extract us from the tangled loops [italics added] of interaction. An interesting aspect of conversation is that one never knows where it will exactly end and who is at the helm. Because conversation is a co-production, there is no set route or destination. As such, doing the research interview is simply not a matter of chunks of information being transmitted between people. More accurately, the conversational process is participatory, collaborative and aesthetically rich. van Manen (1990) writes:

> A conversation is not just a personal relation between two or more people who are involved in the conversation. A conversation may start off as a mere chat, and in fact this is usually the way that conversations come into being. But then, when gradually a certain topic of mutual interest emerges, and the speakers become in a sense animated by the notion to which they are now both oriented, a true conversation comes into being. p. 98

During the interview dialogue, the words which are used do not convey information [italics added] but reflect the speaker's world. Sellick (1989) suggests that language does not describe the world out there [italics added], but discloses the inner infinity of the unsaid. Gergen (1991) elaborates by saying that, "...words are not maps of reality. Rather, words gain their meaning through their use in social interchange, within the language games [italics original] of the culture" (p. 102). Consequently, Gergen (1985) does not focus on the matter of individual minds and cognitive processes but instead turns his attention toward the world of shared systems of intelligibility and inter-subjectivity. As such, meaning and truth are not found in correct representations instead they arise between researcher and co-researcher when a common world of language is formed. This interpersonal connectedness which culminates in dialogue with others has been referred to as mutual stickiness [italics added] Maturana (1980). A mutual understanding is created when the phenomenon has been pushed to the extent where no more can be said.

Constructivism and the Hermeneutical Circle

Realizing how both researcher and co-researcher are tangled in a conversational loop (with each affecting one another) the idea of objectivity is challenged and the concept of constructivism emerges. Efran, Lukens & Lukens (1988) write, "...the images of the objectivist can be thought of as discoveries [italics original] about the outside world, and images of the constructivist are more like inventions [italics original] about what is out there (p. 28). Although psychologist George Kelly is recognized as the first person to introduce the constructivist perspective to the fields of personality and mental health, other theorists (e.g., Bateson, 1972; Maturana, 1980; von Glasersfeld, 1991; Watzlawick, 1984) have been instrumental in advancing constructivist theory and practice.

Appreciating the co-constructive basis of dialogue is fundamentally crucial when considering the interpretative element within descriptive phenomenology. For example, as a story is shared between two people the words and descriptors that are used undergo an continuous interpretation throughout the conversation. Therefore, what needs to be underscored is the subjectivity of each description and interpretation. According to Varela (1984), in contrast with what is commonly assumed, upon careful inspection a description reveals the properties of the observer. The richness and basic underpinnings of phenomenological inquiry is lost when one gravitates to a blueprint of reality and to one correct view or perspective. Goodman (1978) suggests that through verbal and non-verbal symbol systems we merely create versions of the world. He further contends that our worldmaking is actually the making of a remaking. The process involved in distinguishing between what seems [italics added] and what is true [italics added]

and what one believes [italics added] and what is true [italics added], although appearing simplistic, is the bedrock of descriptive phenomenological inquiry.

Although at first glance this process sounds reasonable and straightforward, it may demand a radical change in our world view and what constitutes knowledge of that world. Simply put, we do not act upon [italics added] the co-researcher to gain information, but rather become engaged in a relationship wherein we are also influenced. Through this lens, descriptive phenomenological research is not an objective and value-free enterprise interested in obtaining data but rather a co-construction. In other words, the interests and activities of the researcher cannot be fully disentangled from the observations he or she produces. Guba & Lincoln (1989) reiterate that the observer cannot (should not) be neatly disentangled from what is being observed during the inquiry process. This process is illuminated in the hermeneutical circle whereby our prejudgments are corrected in view of the text thus, leading to new prejudgments. Schwandt (1994) considers the hermeneutical circle a methodological device that is used to consider the whole in relation to its parts and vice versa. During this constant transformation, the feedback we receive in the conversational loop generates news of a difference [italics added] (Bateson, 1972). Consequently, prejudgments are continually surrendered and replaced by new pre-understandings (Gadamer, 1976). Becoming aware of this process however, does not eliminate the possibility of valuable research. It only punctuates the mutuality and interpretations that exist between researcher and co-researcher.

The strength of phenomenological inquiry lies in one's potential to remain open to various perspectives of experiences without having to adhere or believe in any

one account [italics added]. Personally, this openness [italics added] and increased conversational space (Goolishian & Winderman, 1988) is the essence of true dialogue with life. The realization that researchers merely describe another person's experience through their own filters is both humbling and liberating. As previously noted, the intent of this research is not to prove something but to describe and share a unique interpretation of a story. Essentially, constructivism recognizes that our hypotheses regarding the lives and stories of our co-researchers are not directly provable. Hypotheses, at best, are temporarily held stories about stories. As Kelly (cited in Maher, 1969) reminded us, current imperfect constructions are our only means of portraying reality and as the history of human thought repeatedly suggests, they are not final.

Because knowledge is inter-subjective, the notion of objectivity is then questioned. Knowing that we each bring our own life experiences and biases, and draw our distinctions during conversations, staking claim to a reality or a truth is highly arguable. Rather than assuming that truth [italics added] has been discovered during a conversation, a story of consensual agreement between researcher and co-researcher is more likely to emerge Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Thus, in place of a definite objective universe, a multi-verse of possibilities is created. Within this process, we do not transcend or remove ourselves from our knowledge but instead seek a richer understanding from which to expand our current domain of knowing. While affirming this perspective, Sellick (1989) contends that, in essence, this is the task of hermeneutics. She remarks that hermeneutics brings into language the hidden possibilities of words and that in

dialogue with one another we create a new naming of the world [italics added] (Gadamer, 1976; Palmer, 1969).

There exists an inseparable unity between ourselves and the static world of which we are a part. Stated differently, we do stand outside of our world. We live in a world which we have created in concert with others around us. Therefore, one person cannot name the world or decide what constitutes reality when in fact, each member of the global community participates in the creation of the world. This task needs to be all inclusive, and involving a mutual trust that is created in dialogue with others, leading to a closer partnership in naming the world. To operate otherwise, would silence the voice of others and cultivate an oppressive environment (Freire, 1986)

A hermeneutic orientation provides us with a way in which to understand how we name the world. Within this orientation, there is a need to continually return to the conversation which generated and hosted our distinctions and ultimate descriptions. During this process, one is reminded that the perceptions upon which eventual descriptions are based are merely maps and not the actual territory (Bateson, 1972). Although the ideas we generate through research tell us nothing about the world as it really is [italics added], all is not lost. What can be accomplished is a way to understand our research journey and perhaps, a reinforcement of our notions. As a result, there may be a temporary fit [italics added] between what we are experiencing within the domain of research and ideas which we have entertained regarding the phenomenon being researched.

What cannot be escaped during the course of research is the influence of personal theories and interests regarding the phenomenon. On a positive note,

such theories and interests are useful as orientation tools when mapping out research territory. Rigid adherence to personal theories and beliefs however, can blind the researcher to other possibilities and hinder his or her research efforts. Rather than recognizing a theory for what it really is: a frame through which we see a particular view, there can be a tendency to marry [italics added] an idea while dismissing or remaining ignorant to other possibilities. Furthermore, rigid adherence to a particular theory limits us to knowledge and boundaries within that theory. Believing that a single correct picture exists for a co-researcher can lead to a sense of certainty. In turn, this inflexible position can result in the naming of the world [italics added] for others and discourage alternate visions of reality.

Hermeneutics primarily has to do with how we achieve understanding. The inherent challenge however is to obtain such an understanding by re-constructing a co-researcher's intention through rigorous methods and principles of interpretation. Ultimately, the credibility and objectivity of interpretation will depend on the accuracy of the researcher's re-construction. Smith asserts:

> ...although the ideas of objectivity, detachment, and methodological constraints as defined by empiricists are a fiction, interpretive inquiry must be made more systematic and rigorous. The claim here is that methods cannot eliminate researcher subjectivity but they can certainly minimize it; they are thereby the criteria against which to judge that some results are more objective than others (p. 157).

Because the historical and ontological distance between researcher and text can cloud one's understanding, the need for correct methodology becomes evident. As Gadamer (1976) views it, the act of understanding is not an event which occurs

between the researcher and co-researcher but an event that occurs between the researcher and text. Within this latter process, there is no attempt to erase the researcher's biases. Rather, tradition, personal history and bias are considered central to one's understanding. In fact, it is our pre-understandings which provide direction in questioning the text and are the pre-condition for all understanding. As we enter into the hermeneutical realm with our pre-understandings in hand, we greet others and celebrate our differences and the possibility of a new understanding of ourselves.

Since there is no right way [italics added] of understanding a text, it only follows that there can be a myriad of interpretations - all being equally valid. The hermeneutical orientation is not a process involving the gathering of facts. It is an orientation to research which invites continued openness to experience and a continued questioning. In essence, there is a perpetual element of not knowing [italics added] which allows the new and surprising to be heard (Sellick, 1989). During this process, what becomes most evident is how the researcher becomes immersed in the process and therefore, cannot be separated from the story being shared.

Procedures

Rationale for a Phenomenological Orientation

In working toward uncovering the inner experience of a school counsellor, a phenomenological orientation was selected because of its emphasis on understanding the meaning of experiences. In emphasizing this point, Giorgi (1994) refers to fidelity to the phenomenon [italics added], and states, "The first criterion for good research is to capture, as clearly as possible, the way in which

the phenomenon appears in everyday life" (p. 207). As noted by van Manen (1990) phenomenology is a philosophy or theory of the unique [italics original] that is interested in that which is not replaceable. From the outset, it should be underscored that phenomenology is not a method but rather an orientation that, "employs descriptive methods, with emphasis on the plural" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 53). Drew (1993) reminds us that phenomenology begins at the moment of reflection when we consider the meaning of a phenomenon. This moment of reflection characterizes an openness [italics added] whereby we might experience the element of surprise and see things that we have not seen before. Kvale (1996) refers to this process as making the invisible visible [italics added]. As noted by Merleau-Ponty (1962) the object of phenomenology is to have us return to direct and immediate contact with the world as we experience it. van Manen (1984) suggests that the doing [italics added] of phenomenological research is a dynamic interplay involving four procedural activities which he outlines as:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and re-writing.

Phenomenology strives to articulate the experiences of everyday existence and seeks universal meaning. Natural science methodologies seemed inappropriate for this type of study, in that, the emphasis of these approaches is on seeking out determined relationships that can be manipulated, controlled and measured. Thus, an understanding of the actual experience can be lost while in search of conceptual

reasoning. Colaizzi (1978) asserts that the rigid operational definitions and conceptions of objectivity, which underlie experimental methods, eliminates the human experience. Consequently, experimental methods tend to pre-establish and delimit the content of psychological inquiry. Colaizzi (1978) suggests a reflective, descriptive method that is conducive to researching and illuminating a topic. The interview process within the phenomenological orientation, as viewed by Drew (1993), "...attends to and preserves the contextual integrity of the data" (p. 346).

As noted by Osborne (1990), the intention of phenomenological research is not to test a hypothesis but rather to ask a question and allowing the data to speak for themselves [italics added]. Although the phenomenological approach did not offer me a theory with which to explain the experiences of the co-researchers, it did provide me with a way of arriving at insights into the world of the rural school counsellor.

A phenomenological orientation afforded me the latitude to uncover the interactional experiences of the school counsellor. Embedded in the interactional relationship that exists between the school counsellor and his or her environment is meaning. Such meaning is the basis of human experience. The essence of this proposed study is an uncovering of personal experience and the description of that experience. Phenomenological research espouses the inner perspective of the person as opposed to the outer perspective inherent in natural science (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Setting/Context

This study was conducted in the Province of Alberta. Interviews were conducted in a setting chosen by the co-researchers. Three interviews were

conducted in counselling offices, one was conducted in an administration office and one was conducted in the home of a co-researcher.

Selection of Co-Researchers

The term co-researcher [italics added] was used in contrast to subject [italics added] or participant [italics added] to underscore the cooperative and voluntary nature of this study. My goal was to eliminate as many demand characteristics as possible in order to create a respectful, trusting and empathetic context. The eventual illumination of the phenomenon dictated the number of co-researchers ultimately involved in this study.

Becker (1986) states that there may be both preferred researchers [italics added] and preferred interviewees [italics added] when investigating the lived experience. Preferred researchers can be characterized as those who have had personal experience with the issue being explored and therefore, in a better position to establish rapport and integrate data from the interviews. Preferred interviewees are individuals closely involved in the phenomena and have related experiences to share. I sought out interviewees were: (1) active school counsellors, (2) individuals willing to share salient experiences of the phenomenon in their everyday lives and, (3) were willing to illuminate the phenomenon of interest (Osborne, 1990; Wertz, 1986).

Co-researchers were selected from rural locations within the Province of Alberta. The location of each co-researcher was at least one and a half hours from the nearest urban center. To recruit potential co-researchers, I contacted the guidance and counselling administration of various schools and I was provided with the names of possible co-researchers.

This study began with an indeterminable sample size and interviews continued until redundancy was heard. Redundancy of themes can emerge even with small numbers of co-researchers (Ray, 1990). When I no longer heard any new descriptions regarding the phenomenon from school counsellors I realized I had reached a saturation point and consequently, I ended the collection phase. Five counsellors were involved in this study. Data collection occurred over a six month period.

Centering

Centering is a contemplative act wherein the researcher experiences himself or herself becoming immersed with the experience of the co-researcher (Parse, 1990; Ray, 1990). It basically involves orienting oneself to the phenomenon. Through this exercise and reflective engagement with the data, the researcher avoids prejudging the data while acknowledging and suspending all preconceived notions about the phenomenon during the generation and early analysis of themes (Reeder, 1988). Prior to entering into a dialogue with the co-researchers, I dwelled with [italics added] the meaning of the lived experience of the rural school counsellor. In doing so, I found myself centering in a way that I would be open to a full and rich discussion of the experience that was to be shared by the co-researchers.

Ethical Considerations

Kvale (1996) contends that, "...ethical decisions do not belong to a separate stage of the interview investigations, but arise throughout the entire research process" (p. 110). As such, decisions regarding this project were carefully considered.

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta and the administration of the various school districts where the co-researchers were employed as school counsellors. Various names were provided to me by several guidance and counselling program directors. After receiving the names and locations of prospective co-researchers, I telephoned several individuals and queried about their interest in participating in this study. When initially speaking with these professionals, I stated the research question that I wanted to explore with them, I explained my interest in the experiences of the rural school counsellor and fully explained the research procedures that I would be following. I described my professional background, my previous experience in collaborating with school counsellors and my goal of contributing to the counsellor education literature. I explained the research project in detail to ensure the full understanding of each individual (Madak, 1994).

During the process of describing the research project, each prospective co-researcher was enthusiastic and voluntarily agreed to participate. Once interest was expressed, further detail about the nature, focus and expectations of the study were provided. I ensured that each question that was raised by the co-researchers was addressed and that his or her role was clearly defined. Co-researchers were informed that they would be asked to describe their experience as a rural school counsellors and that I was interested in learning about their stories. They were advised that they did not have to elaborate on anything that made them uncomfortable and that they could stop the interview at any time. In addition, the co-researchers were informed that if, following the completion of the interview,

they did not want to allow their interview to be used, I would remove their data from the research. None of the researchers chose to have this done. It was explained that individual perspectives and meaning would be emphasized in the analysis. The involvement of external reviewers to augment the trustworthiness of the study was also discussed and permitted by each co-researcher.

Special care was taken to describe and guarantee co-researcher confidentiality and anonymity. Interview times and locations were left to the discretion of each co-researcher to ensure his or her comfort. Upon reflection, the telephone calls were extremely valuable and perhaps, the most important part of the engagement process. During telephone conversations, a positive and respectful tone was created and seemed to carry over into the interviews. Speaking on the telephone prior to the interviews, provided an opportunity for the co-researchers and me to become better acquainted.

The identification of each co-researcher has also remained confidential. Pseudonyms are used to identify co-researchers and any other persons named in the interviews (e.g., administrators, colleagues, friends, etc.). Names of towns and institutions were blanked out to ensure confidentiality.

Security precautions were taken to preserve privacy. Tapes, transcripts and texts were locked in a file whenever I was not working with the data. When documents were sent to the co-researchers for trustworthiness checks, envelopes were labeled confidential and a courier service was used to transport the material. To confirm the delivery and receipt of the material, each co-researcher was contacted directly.

De-briefing

Barrett (1995) underscores the importance of providing co-researchers with information which they might need or request concerning the nature of the study. She further notes (1995), "The researcher should also discuss with the subjects their experience of the research process, so that if there are any unintended or unanticipated effects of the research, these can be monitored" (p. 31). As such, each co-researcher was made aware that if they required continued attention in order to resolve any personal problems that may have emerged during the data collection and review process, I would ensure appropriate services would be identified. Having the opportunity to discuss their impressions of the interview process and the protocol with each co-researcher allowed me to ensure that there were no unresolved issues.

I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to meet and speak with the five co-researchers who were also co-architects for this project. Each interview was a very pleasurable and rewarding experience for me. I admire each co-researcher for his or her courage in sharing very intimate stories in such a candid fashion. Knowing that these professionals trusted me and had confidence in me was, and continues to be, extremely meaningful. They risked a great deal in opening up and I believe they were willing to do so because they were truly invested in their profession and wanted to make a sincere contribution. I deeply value what I learned from our conversations.

Knowing that I was going to embark on the process of getting to know another colleague at the beginning of each interview was a very appealing and exciting experience. Not knowing what experiences were going to shared and articulated

increased my anticipation and sense of exploration. I sensed a similar enthusiasm on the part of each co-researcher. Neither of us knew where the conversation was going lead. The unstructured format of the interviews appeared to help the co-researchers relax while sharing stories at their own pace. As conversations unfolded naturally, we seemed to enter into a flow whereby we allowed the topic to take its natural course and eventually fade into another area of discussion. The humor that accompanied many stories and memories added a welcome dimension and seemed to create a bond between us.

All the co-researchers expressed their pleasure with the interview process on several occassions. Without exception, they were all impacted after having read their respective protocols. Hutchinson, Wilson & Wilson-Skodal (1994) outline the benefits for people who volunteer to participate in in-depth interviews. Benefits that are identified include: (1) catharsis, (2) self-acknowledgment, (3) sense of purpose, (4) self-awareness, (5) empowerment, (6) healing and, (7) providing a voice for the disenfranchised. A general sense of pride and personal accomplishment resounded from their reactions. They all felt that having participated in the study added to a deeper understanding of themselves and their circumstances. Not surprisingly, their common concern pertained to whether or not they were helpful enough. I perceived this as yet another indication of their interest, commitment and caring.

Interview Format

The interview format was based on a three phase model proposed by Osborne (1990). The phases of this model include: (1) the establishment of rapport and information sharing, (2) data gathering and, (3) appropriate closure. During the

engagement process with the co-researchers, roles were clarified and discussed. In addition, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity were reviewed. Pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher and agreed upon by the co-researchers. The co-researchers were also informed that the names of various locations would be blanked out to ensure confidentiality.

The actual interview was open-ended and minimally structured to encourage the participation of the co-researchers. A list of aspects of the phenomenon I wanted to cover were available and were only utilized judiciously when necessary. This specific interview format was chosen because it provided the freedom to explore the counsellor's responses.

It was not the intention of this study to prove something but rather, to invite school counsellors to elaborate on their experiences in order to illuminate the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, it was necessary to create a warm, trusting and supportive context wherein the participants could engage in an oral conversation (e.g., Oakley, 1981). Probing questions designed to help guide participants that are appropriate for the personal experience method were used judiciously.

The duration of each interview was approximately one to one and a half hours. Each interview was audiotaped in order to record the necessary data and later transcribed verbatim in its entirety. In each case, only one gathering interview was necessary. Co-researchers were informed that if they experienced the need to de-brief or discuss any concerns that emerged from our discussion, they were encouraged to contact me and that I would assist them in locating the necessary

suppo t. The co-researchers were provided with both my office and home telephone numbers for easy access.

Flexible and relaxed interview techniques were utilized during conversations with the co-researchers. To ensure good sound quality for later transcriptions, the co-researchers sat in close proximity to me. All the interviews were conducted by me in person. The initial statement made to the co-researchers was as follows: "Please describe for me as completely as possible your experience as a rural school counsellor". Following this request, each co-researcher was then invited to reflect (recollect) and elaborate while I facilitated the articulation of the co-researcher's experience. During the course of the interviews, co-researchers were asked to clarify and expand on issues that required further elaboration. Once the co-researcher began to share his or her experience, I remained focused on his or her descriptions in order to understand their experience. At times, when I thought the co-researcher was becoming detached from the topic, I would gently re-direct him or her with such comments as, "Can you share more about what that was like for you". The purpose of these interventions was to direct the co-researchers back to their reflections on their experiences. An effort was made to avoid leading questions and remain focused on elaboration. When we reached a point where I thought the co-researcher's experience had been fully articulated the following question was asked: "Is there any thing else that you would like to add that has not yet been addressed?"

Trustworthiness (Rigour) of the Study

Descriptive phenomenology is frequently criticized by proponents of positivistic tradition as lacking in scientific rigour. As noted by Osborne (1990) however, the

metatheoretical differences that exist between phenomenological research and natural science need to be acknowledged when discussing the concepts of reliability and validity in qualitative research. van Manen (1990) contends that the normal scientific requirements of objectivity and subjectivity need to be re-considered when conducting phenomenological research. This is primarily due to the fact that what is considered as rigour within phenomenological research is fundamentally different than that which exists within the positivistic tradition. Osborne (1990) states that natural science research aims at objectivity through explanation, control and prediction whereas phenomenological research focuses on the elucidation of meaning and understanding of human existence from an individual's point of view. In essence, natural science is an explanatory science while phenomenological research is a descriptive science. Other differences highlighted by Osborne (1990) include: the need for statistical generalizability within natural science methodology compared to empathic generalizability within phenomenological research, the tendency of natural science researchers to search for reality while phenomenological researchers look to the actuality of human lived-experience as the fundamental reality.

When discussing reliability however, the intrinsic interrelationship between reliability and validity surfaces. Wertz (1986), for example, asserts that reliability cannot be separated from validity in qualitative research because its sole purpose is to bring what is being studied into focus in its essential meaning. It has been suggested by Wertz (1986) that reliability is intrinsically contextbound and implies the meaning of the measuring observer. Osborne (1990) further asserts that measurement always involves the measurement of something which has to be

conceptualized by the observer in order to be measured. Consequently, the phenomenological researcher understands that the observation of behavior is perspectival and contextual and that reliability can only be estimated. Due to the nature of phenomenological research and lack of absolute interpretations, the major risk of unreliability and invalidity in phenomenological research resides in the interpretive process (Kvale, 1983).

As proposed by Wertz (1986), the criterion of qualitative reliability is the persistence of meaning through factual variations. Again, one must remain mindful that phenomenology is not a science of empirical facts (van Manen, 1990) but rather, a method to uncover essential structures of human experience. Productive phenomenological research supplies a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like for someone to experience something (Polkinghorne, 1983). It is through the examination of subjective lifeworld experiences of individual perspectives that the researcher is able to establish an essential structure of meaning common to these perspectives.

Although the concepts of objectivity, reliability and validity are useful in evaluating the rigour of positivistic research, this study satisfies the criteria that are congruent with establishing rigour within qualitative research as elaborated by Koch (1994). Credibility, transferability and dependability therefore, are primary criteria by which this study is appropriately evaluated. The overall trustworthiness of this research was assessed in four ways and included: (1) bracketing, (2) credibility, (3) transferability and, (4) dependability.

Bracketing

Bracketing was the starting point for this study. Using Husserl's philosophical perspective I approached this study bracketing my presuppositions, assumptions, and theoretical knowledge (Ihde, 1977). My rationale in doing so, was to maintain an openness to the lived experience of the counsellors without the influence of presuppositions. The realization that researchers frequently select topics which are personally meaningful is well documented in the qualitative research literature (e.g., Berg, 1995). Through attentive reflection, I identified my presuppositions and biases toward the experiences of the rural school counsellor. The purpose of involving myself in this process was not to work toward achieving a state of absolute disinterest, of course, but to realize how my interest in this research topic would color my research activity (Colaizzi, 1978)

Credibility

Rather than using the constructs of internal validity and truth values, Guba & Lincoln (1989) refer to the concept of credibility. These authors remark, "...a study is credible when it presents faithful descriptions and when co-researchers or readers confronted with the experience can recognize it " (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 976). This process was accomplished through consultation with co-researchers during the collection and description phases to ensure goodness of fit [italics added]. This process provided me with the opportunity to share my descriptions with the co-researchers thus, allowing me to check the congruence of my descriptions with their experience. The purpose of this process was to ensure that I did not distort the co-researcher's experience. The co-researchers participated in a two phase process to ensure the credibility of this research. First, they were

asked to read the entire document and provide verbal feedback. Second, they were asked to further reflect on the documents and provide written comments regarding their impressions.

Transferability

To ensure transferability, the essential structure of the co-researchers' experiences should resonate with the experience of other professionals who were not in this study but yet familiar with this phenomenon. To accomplish this, two seasoned rural school counsellors who now serve as consultants to rural school counsellors, were asked to review each protocol in their entirety. After doing so, they were asked to provide feedback regarding whether or not the data resonate their own experiences. The concurrence of the external participants of the study therefore, was a further measure of this study's confirmability.

Dependability/Auditability

The dependability/auditability of this study is based on the decision trail [italics added] (Koch, 1994). This involves presenting the process of the study in a coherent presentation and includes: my interest in the topic, the purpose of the study, participant selection, data collection and its time line, the context of the interviews and the analysis of the data. Transcripts and remarks from the co-researchers were reviewed and scrutinized. Because the credibility of this study is established linguistically and not statistically, it was imperative that the research be presented in a persuasive argument and that my findings are well-grounded and well-supported. The coherent presentation of my data will be instrumental in gaining the acceptance of the research community (Polkinghorne, 1983). It is important that the reader is able to follow my thought process and each step of my

data analysis in a logical and clear fashion. By doing so, it should be possible for the reader to draw similar conclusions as demonstrated in the research.

This study satisfied the aforementioned criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of the study in the following ways. First, I documented my prior assumptions about the experience of the rural school counsellor at the outset of this research project. This statement consisted of my pre-understanding of the phenomenon. Second, upon the completion of every individual interview protocol I received verbal and written confirmation from each respective co-researcher supporting the accuracy of my descriptions. This process completed a feedback loop involving myself and each co-researcher. Third, the verbal reports of two external reviewers also confirmed the accuracy of my descriptions based on their experience and personal knowledge pertaining to the phenomena. Fourth, the rigorous process which I undertook to complete this study, and its concurrence or nonconcurrence, was scrutinized throughout each phase of the study by other scholars (e.g., my supervisor).

Chapter IV

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The data analysis process of phenomenological research involves uncovering the essential structures of the phenomenon in question. The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is not a one dimensional entity but rather a multi-dimensional structure consisting of many parts that make up the whole. To understand the experience of the school counsellor, it is important that the various components of their overall experience be acknowledged and then synthesized into a logical and coherent whole. Phenomenological themes are essential structures of the experience and when synthesized into a whole, they represent the experience of being explored. The approach to data analysis based on guidelines as set forth by Colaizzi (1978) and Osborne (1990) is outlined below. Following the research interviews, a series of steps were followed in a hierarchical manner in order to analyze the material in a reflective and meaningful manner.

Stages of Analysis

1. Interview as a Whole

Immediately following the interview, the taped interview was carefully listened to and reviewed. During this process, I was attempting to gain an awareness of the experiences as described by the co-researchers. I paid particular attention to the timbre of voice and recalled body language that I had noted during the conversation. Inaudible words on the tape were eventually clarified.

2. Interview as Text

This step involved two levels. First, each interview was transcribed into a written protocol. I decided that I would transcribe the tapes personally for two reasons. First and foremost, it ensured the anonymity of the co-researchers and secondly, it gave me the opportunity to immerse myself more fully in the material. Although the transcription process involved a great deal of work, the effort was more than worthwhile. While transcribing the tapes, I gained a greater sensitivity to the experiences shared.

After the transcription process, each protocol was then read in its entirety several times with key words and significant phrases highlighted. This process was important and provided me with the opportunity to familiarize myself with the data. Second, during final readings of the entire protocol significant statements reflecting a counsellor's experience were extracted, paraphrased and meanings were then attached to each of these significant statements. The purpose of the interpretations was to reflect an initial understanding of the meaning a counsellor associated to his or her experiences.

Table 4-1
Overview of the Data Analysis

Within Persons Analysis			Between Persons Analysis
Co-researcher	First Order Themes	Second Order Clustered Themes	Second Order Themes for all Co-researchers
Example	Table 2	Table 3	Table 4

3. First Order Thematic Abstraction

The significant statements, paraphrased meanings and thematic descriptors were then placed in a tabular form and were referred to as the First Order Thematic Abstraction [italics added] of each counsellor's experience. During this stage of research, I had the opportunity to become sensitive to the essential structure of the counsellor's experiences while systematically outlining the structure of these experiences. Capturing the essence of each counsellor's experience was required in order to appreciate the uniqueness of the individual and to compare experiential similarities and differences among the co-researchers.

Table 4-2

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Alana's Experience

	Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrase	Themes
1.	But then you find the rural areas - especially up north is that you might be the only person there in the school division. And when something like a crisis or whatever comes up you handle it. You learn to handle it. And it's either you or no one else.	When working in a rural location, self-reliance and independence become necessary characteristics.	Identification of important personal traits.
2.	... there was six months there where there was nobody at the Alberta Mental Health. Because they left. They left and so I didn't even have anybody I	The lack of community resources directly impacts the ability to provide adequate services.	Unavailability of adequate resources.

	could refer them to.		
3.	**...there was nobody else that for like two and a half hours down the road. And I found especially in _____ there was a large number of crises.**	**The problem of distance to obtain appropriate clinical coupled with frequent crises increased her sense of isolation.**	**Feeling alone and isolated.**
4.	**...and there was a lot of transient people and the town was growing a lot. It grew by about 1500 people in the two years that I was there. And of course, the high school grew and the number of kids grew. And there was one counsellor for.. what did we have, about 600 kids. So it was one for six hundred in that one school.**	**She was faced with the task of having to accomodate to the counselling needs of a rapidly growing school population.**	**Keeping pace.**

4. Second Order Thematic Cluster

The fourth step of the hierarchical process was the creation of a Second Order Thematic Cluster. This involved clustering identified counsellor themes (as found in the First Order Thematic Abstractions) to a second order thematic grouping in tabular form with the inclusion of a general description. These descriptions reflect the essence of the experience within the theme of the co-researchers and were utilized when comparing experiences. Thus, forming the basis for the synthesis of the counsellor's experience. As individual themes, which represent parts of the overall experience were synthesized, a global picture of the counsellor's experience can begin to emerge. The thematic clustering process provided a mechanism whereby, the essence or structure of the counsellor's experience was understood.

Table 4-3

Second Order Thematic Clusters of Alana's Experience

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
1. Multiple expectations. (5, 16, 56, 57)	One implication of being the only school counsellor in the rural district is that Alana is often expected to meet the myriad of expectations within the school and community.
2. The lack of accessibility to appropriate clinical services. (2, 3, 15, 17, 58, 61)	The lack of appropriate clinical services available to students and their families, compared to their urban counterparts, is an ongoing concern for Alana and creates in her a sense of frustration.
3. Difficulty involved in locating and securing clinical supervision consultation. (9, 14, 34, 21)	Although invested in advancing her counselling skills, Alana discusses the obstacles that face rural school counsellors. The lack of skilled professionals within the smaller community creates a logistical hurdle in terms of her personal development.
4. Acknowledging the support and direction of administration and colleagues. (12, 18, 19, 35, 36, 38).	Alana recognizes administrative and peer support while working in very stressful and demanding circumstances. The support that emerges is an indication of how she is valued and respected among her colleagues.
5. Having to work in isolation and independently with minimal support or direction. (1, 8, 63, 64, 65)	Although Alana experienced periods of feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities and expectations which were levied upon her, she developed an increased sense of independence and self-reliance. Within a very short period of time, she was able to adjust and accommodate to student

		needs.
6.	**Trying to establish professional identity amidst radical change.** **(4, 6, 7)**	**The lack of stability and consistency among peers and administration, coupled with a rapid increase in student populations and problems, left Alana with feelings of doubt and uncertainty.**

5. Protocol Synthesis

This step in the data analysis process involved the generation of the protocol synthesis. This process involved reflecting on and summarizing the co-researcher's overall experience. While completing this process, various themes surfaced and I was drawn back to the original text and the overall story that was described to me.

Table 4-4

Within Persons Analysis (Alana)

Upon her entrance into the profession of school counselling, Alana quickly discovered the consequences of working in isolation and without adequate community resources (1, 2, 3, 15). Due to her circumstances, she found herself in what can be described as overwhelming situations. In addition to having to grapple with immediate student concerns, the rural area in which she worked began to rapidly grow in population and thus, presented her with additional problems regarding student services (4, 17).

Being the only school counsellor in the district, Alana had to also contend with requests from other schools (16). The intensity under which she worked was illustrated by the severity of cases she was expected to deal with (6, 14). Amidst the problems of students, the rapid turnover in staff seemed to intensify matters (6, 7). Within a short period of time, she realized how drastic an effect such a

working environment could have on school personnel. She came to appreciate the career plans of her colleagues along with their coping strategies (8). Without the needed support and resources, she began to set realistic and manageable goals for herself in order to cope and function effectively within her job (9).

Despite the hardship and disadvantages of working independently, Alana began to recognize the positive features that were associated with her situation (10). The opportunities which were made available to her were personally valued and her expertise was acknowledged by colleagues (11, 12). Feeling useful, appreciated, and with more experience, Alana carefully considered her career options and agreed to extend her contract. It appears that after having survived the initial onslaught of her first year, she gained the necessary confidence to continue within such a demanding environment (13).

6. Overall Synthesis

This step involved reflecting upon the various themes that emerged from each protocol. This process provided another way of understanding the essential structure of each counsellor's experience while discerning the uniqueness of each counsellor's experience. The resulting overview also provided me with the opportunity to compare experiences in a descriptive format and relate these descriptions to existing research pertaining to the school counsellor.

7. Between Persons Analysis

Following the synthesis, the clustered themes for all co-researchers were presented in a grid format. The purpose of this format was to provide a quick visual reference regarding specific themes which were or were not present in each counsellor's experience. Additionally, this process was helpful when comparing

experiences among counsellors and in formulating a global picture of the counsellor's inner experience.

Table 4-5

Note: X indicates the presence of a given theme as an essential structure of that co-researcher's experience.

Second Order Themes	Debbie	John	Jane	Alana	Kaye
Privacy and Isolation	X	X	X	X	X
Sense of Isolation	X			X	X
Performing a Dual Role	X	X		X	X
Community Networking		X	X	X	X
Lack of Community Resources				X	X
Lack of Formal Training Opportunities		X	X	X	
Peer and Administrative Support	X	X	X	X	X
Continuity of Relationships	X	X		X	

SYNTHESIS OF INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

Co-researcher One: Debbie

From the outset of her career as a school counsellor, Debbie was deeply committed to the process of establishing and nurturing meaningful relationships with students. By doing so, she believed that students discovered an adult who was genuinely interested in their experiences and feelings. Debbie was invested in remaining emotionally present to students and perceived relationships with students as pivotal to her work.

> And what I most loved about it was that just as you are interested in hearing my story I was interested in kids stories. So when they came to me I truly believed that some of those little dear hearts were experiencing somebody listening to them for the first time.

Although granting that the provision of general information (e.g., college requirements) was important to students, she firmly believed that the establishment of a trusting and caring relationship took precedence. As such, the high value Debbie placed on human interactions and interpersonal relationships was evident.

> For me, in elementary school in particular, (which is where I have been until recently) really involved listening to and doing what I could to assist the kids who were in crisis, who were in pain and it also involved doing the preventative stuff - going into classrooms so that I could start teaching them about communication and positive relationships and I love that stuff. So it was really, in many ways, cut out for me except that I felt I was forever prevented from doing what I was really good at.

Developing a context wherein children felt safe and secure was critical to Debbie. It was her belief, for example, that working in the same school as her children eased the transition from home to school for other students. Inherent in this belief was Debbie's self imposed responsibility to remain nurturing and caring toward these young students. Having the school environment become more

responsive to the emotional needs of students seemed to be the essence of Debbie's intentions as a school counsellor.

> But having said all of that, I loved being a counsellor in elementary school. I would bill myself as sort of an adult friend with the little kids because I felt that they could understand and I would bill myself as another person that they could come and talk to besides parents and aunts and uncles and teachers to the older ones.

A theme which runs through Debbie's story is the opposition she endured from administrators in fulfilling her role as a school counsellor. Her impression was that administrative personnel were minimizing the need for counselling and were more interested in having her assume teaching responsibilities. During the course of her career, Debbie has experienced administrators who have tried, through intimidation, to dissuade her from remaining passionate about her role as a school counsellor. Due to the resistance she encountered from administrators, which was in direct contrast to how she perceived the role of the school counsellor, Debbie felt unappreciated and restricted in her work.

> So my biggest problem in the school system, ever since I have been in the school system, has been that I really believe most people, and particularly some administrators that I have had, have tried to turn me into a teacher. It's like they don't quite know what to do with me if I'm not a teacher. So you're not really allowed - I have not ever felt like I have been allowed to fulfill my role as a counsellor. I

could just go on at nauseam about an experience I had with an administrator when I first started which was positively frightening. Apart from the fact that I think he was an unhealthy, abusive person, he would tell me things for ever and ever and ever - like I had the easiest job in the school. And it would drive him crazy when he wouldn't see me taking heaps of marking home and that sort of thing.

It was obvious to Debbie that school administrators, and some teachers, were unsure of the school counsellor's function within the school setting. During these times, Debbie had to contend with internal dynamics between her and her colleagues as well as counselling issues presented by students. Feeling that she had to rationalize and justify her position as a school counsellor became a predictable occurrence.

And I particularly felt in one school that not only did I have to justify my position, but often in rationalizing what I was doing it was "Oh well, that's discipline, the administrators handle that" or "that's what teachers do". So I really felt that one administrator in particular was working hard to make sure there was no job for me.

The transition to a new school which involved a different administration and an older student population emerged as a significant challenge for Debbie. During this transition period, there were some unexpected and at times, frustrating experiences. Perhaps the most disturbing experience was the uncivil reception she received upon her arrival. This greeting seemed to accentuate her transition and

immediately contributed to an uncomfortable and difficult work environment. Sensing hostility and resentment from administrators and colleagues, Debbie's need for connection and acceptance was not forthcoming. As a result of being excluded from the larger group she felt persecuted, ostracized and discriminated against. Her unprepared office space seemed to symbolize the lack of importance school administration placed on the area of school counselling. Without a larger professional community to which she could turn for support, Debbie experienced feelings of invalidation and exclusion. To compound her personal grief, Debbie felt obliged to relinquish her own needs in order to accommodate colleagues who were established within the school.

> So that was really hard and I also felt angry. Because I felt two things. I felt, first of all, there are three male administrators in that school and two male counsellors. So whenever we get together for meetings, it's like, you know, five of them and one of me. Secondly, I felt that maybe even if it had been one of the men counsellors had to take that office, that maybe a door... but I don't know that I was just imagining that.

Shortly after transitioning to the high school context, Debbie began to observe and contrast the behavioral distinctions between younger and older students. In particular, she noticed that they were more disengaged and less candid in comparison to the younger students she was accustomed to. There was also a marked difference in the manner in which they related to school personnel.

> I mean children are so wonderful. They're so incredibly

beautiful as compared to the high school where some kids who need help the most have already learned that they need to be protective. That sadly enough you can't trust everyone. It's a wonderful idea but you can be hurt when you open up. But to know that I am struggling in a system now, I'm brand new, this is my first time in this school and I'm in a school where counselling has always meant coming and asking about scholarship applications, coming and asking about whether we should go to NAIT or SAIT, and coming and adding a course, dropping a course. And so I am not only working with an age group now that for probably very good reasons at protecting self are more closed, I'm working within a system where the counselling area is thought of as someplace where you go when you're registering for both semesters... or when you want to get some information on where to go to school.

Due to the curriculum design within the high school setting, she was also unable to spend as much time in the classrooms with the students as she wished, or thought was necessary, to conduct preventative education. As a result of Debbie's limited time within the classroom, her concern regarding issues of trust and acceptance among students became further accentuated with the adolescent student population.

One of the students who was slashing her wrists in class and was talking about how her family hated her and how

> they were cruel to her. Social Services was brought in and I've lost them all, Patrick. Like the young woman in high school, she won't even talk to me... And that's a really big one. That's painful for me. I hate it. I really hate it.

It was apparent to Debbie that the prevalent view of the high school students regarding the role of the school counsellor was merely one of an academic advisor. From Debbie's perspective a major challenge she faced was altering the perceptions of the students regarding her role. Rather than being perceived as someone who simply assisted students in designing academic schedules, Debbie was interested in expanding the student's understanding of the function of the school counsellor. The warm greetings from former elementary school students however, seemed to offset some of Debbie's worry.

Situations that required the involvement of family and social services were particularly troubling for Debbie. As noted in her narrative, the decision to involve child welfare workers in cases of suspected parental abuse or neglect proved to be quite complex and disruptive for the general school population. An aspect of this intervention which was of concern pertained to the potential loss of student trust. By involving outside professional help, Debbie's underlying fear was that students would begin to perceive her as an authoritative figure in whom they could no longer confide in. A dreaded consequence of this perception was that she would be alienated and rejected by students. Clearly, Debbie's professional obligations, and her loyalty to the children she served, presented a dilemma for her. Although she wanted the students to confide in her, she realized the limitation to which confidentiality could be maintained. Knowing that students would probably fail to

understand her dilemma, or the complexity of the matter, was a challenge for Debbie.

> I find it hard being a counsellor where the child is referred to me as part of the disciplinary system. ...often by the time they come to me then I'm just another line of, you know, the authority that they need to resist and so it's not only hard because its harder to actually, you know, feel that they're going to trust me enough to allow me to be helpful to them. This isn't to blame any particular person in Social Services but there's something wrong with the system. Because I've lost students' trust by -it's sort of like, "tell me anything and open up your hearts to me, it's totally confidential". And I try to say, "except if you do tell me that somebody's hurting you in any way, then I'll need to get somebody else to help". But sometimes the person coming in to wouldn't feel like help to those kids. And that's a battle I struggle with all the time.

In moving to a larger school, Debbie's experienced increased anxiety regarding the perception of counselling services as a mere extension of the disciplinary system. Her major concern was that the students would avoid enlisting her help and resist her efforts to assist in matters. Again, the primary issue of student trust, or the lack of it, emerged for Debbie.

Due to the challenges Debbie faced at work, she began to reflect and focus on self. During this time, a parallel process surfaced which included searching for a

place within the work environment and searching for a comfort in her new found identity. As a result of this parallel process, Debbie entered into a deliberation process which she shares in a candid manner. She became introspective and sought a balance in her life.

I was having another struggle and the other struggle that I didn't realize that I was having, was this sense that I really wasn't safe to be who I was.

I walked in suddenly feeling that I had to censor myself.

It's really interesting that we're conducting this interview now because September... I've had a really hard time in the school system as a counsellor. Formerly because of an abusive principal who was threatened by counsellors and particularly by me. And now, when I'm sort of realizing that... I mean, do you know one of the hardest things is for these kids that don't belong. And it is in high school that alot of kids are getting it if they're different. And I want to be able to endorse that it is ok to be different. And it would be true, I mean I really did examine alot of this.

Not wanting to succumb to the adversity which surrounded her, she began to acknowledge her own identity and in a very private way, celebrated this discovery. Interestingly enough, what also emerged during this stressful period was a creative energy and greater compassion for students whom she perceived as being unique, isolated and alone.

So what's happened this year Patrick, is that I've actually seen

students in my class that I'm sure could be gay or at least could have those tendencies. And part of me just wants to, you know, wrap them in my arms and say, "you are ok just the way you are". And what I have to remind myself is that I could still give that message. But I felt so vulnerable. I felt so vulnerable then.

Being a person who thrived on relationships, Debbie was disappointed and hurt as a result of the unpleasant greeting she received in her new context. Without an office to work from, coupled with ill feelings conveyed from her colleagues, Debbie began to insulate herself and create her own personal space.

So I'm already coming back into a situation where I'm feeling vulnerable because it's hard to feel like people are prepared for you and wanting you when your promised space is not at all ready. I was already feeling like I couldn't celebrate fully who I was. And now I was aware that there was a malicious rumor in the community that is information that I passed on to my CALM classes.

Rather than retreat in self pity, she designed an environment and ambiance that symbolized her personal values. In spite of the lack of support and assistance from school administration, she remained persistent and capitalized on the opportunity to secure a sense of self. In many ways, Debbie's persistence and determination were the very characteristics she encouraged students to develop and utilize in the own lives. Rather than abandon their uniqueness, it seemed important to Debbie that students maintain integrity especially in the face of

adversity. The congruity between what Debbie exhorted and what she practiced in her own life was evident in her behavior.

Truly understanding the loneliness that is associated with being ostracized, Debbie became increasingly sensitive to those students who appeared socially disconnected.

> When I was a kid I used to wish I were different. Well now, I realize that I am, I mean, I am and it's ok. So I guess part of it is for that to continue to help them to be open and to tolerate difference. Especially for the ones who feel that they're different.

She was emotionally drawn to students who did not appear to fit in or who were perceived as different. Wanting to normalize their uniqueness, Debbie's first inclination was to embrace those students and encourage them to persist in their chosen lifestyle. A personal dissonance developed however, when Debbie's own sense of vulnerability prevented her from fully extending herself to students. What became entangled was Debbie's personal process regarding her own identity, the needs of the students and what she perceived as an unsafe work environment. Although wanting to help socially isolated students, Debbie felt constrained by her own insecurities and apprehensions. Desperately wanting to publicly celebrate her identity, she remained mindful of the broader context and implications for her children and former partner.

> So, although I knew I had not told my CALM classes, I thought, "What have I told my CALM classes that people have put this together". And so there was all this self

examination. Not too much recrimination but still alot of personal fear. I felt really protective of my children. I felt protective of my former partner. I felt really frightened of myself, so I walked into class the next day - it was the first day of classes.

Not only was the work environment restrictive and unpleasant, but she also felt compelled to portray a false image of who she was in order to remain safe. As Debbie vividly recounted this dilemma, the intensity which surrounded it resurfaced.

It's like this... on the one hand, so hoping not to be seen because my invisibility protects me. And on the other hand, being so deeply wounded that I am not seen and so desperately wanting to be seen. So it's both of them.

After a brief period of withdrawal and personal reflection, she found herself reaching a point of personal comfort in terms of what she could reveal and the opinions she could express. Subsequently, she became less tentative when interacting with students and colleagues.

A major transition that occurred for Debbie involved accepting direct teaching responsibilities. Although initially resistant to the idea, Debbie discovered the value of classroom experience. Rather than viewing this transition as a negative development, she began to realize the advantages of teaching experience in order to augment her counselling duties.

You know I said earlier that I feel that this whole time I've been in the system they've been trying to turn me into a

teacher and I resisted it. Well now here I am full time in the high school and I've become a teacher. And exactly what I have resisted for so long has finally come true. On the other hand, being in the classroom helps me be more sensitive to the teachers, helps me understand what they do experience and it allows me to do some of the preventative stuff.

Finding herself in a new context, Debbie began to adjust accordingly while confidently looking forward to assuming new tasks and broadening her experience.

It's hard. I find it really hard. So all these transitions, really identifying myself as a single woman and as someone who would choose probably to be single or to be partnered with another woman. And all these big things but it's starting to feel better.

Co-researcher Two: John

Early on in John's career as an educator, he realizes both his potential in working in the area of counselling and the flexibility which is required to effectively function as a rural school counsellor. His ability to interact effectively with young people was demonstrated in his previous counselling experience with emotionally disturbed adolescents as well as, his involvement in extracurricular athletic activities.

I coached the football team and whatever else needed to be done. The counsellor that was there at the time, moved into a central office position. After that year said to me, "Look

you have a good rapport with kids. Why don't you apply for that position?". I said, "Sure, I'll talk about it". I had a few qualifications. Probably some of the contrasts would be the number of hats you wear as a rural counsellor. You're the first line of defense for alot of things.

These talents eventually resulted in John being recruited as a school counsellor. In addition to having his skills recognized and acknowledged by school administrators, John also discovers that the area of counselling is indeed personally gratifying. Despite the logistical hurdles facing him, he decides to pursue formal counsellor education to supplement the natural skills he possesses.

And of course, that is one of the issues if you interview people is the difficulty getting training. You know, you have to go to Edmonton or Calgary from here really if you want to get some training as a counsellor.

Like if you compare rural counsellors with urban counsellors, if you're living in Edmonton or Calgary you finish your day's work at school you can pick up a night class quite easily. You can establish residency, you know, quite easily. You can't in the rural area and that's an issue.

In addition to the level of personal commitment and the inherent challenges of seeking counsellor education in a distant urban center, John recognizes the vagueness of his job responsibilities as a school counsellor. Although receiving moral support from administration regarding his willingness to pursue formal training, such encouragement was not always forthcoming from colleagues. In

fact, his interest in pursuing graduate training was actually met with some skepticism.

> And I guess I found that there probably wasn't alot of direction as far as what we were supposed to be doing. You just kind of... there were some things I felt very strongly about and other things we were required to do - some of the technical things like registering, working with new students, registering kids coming from the rural...
> But, they were supportive. But there was never any money. Sabbaticals were, and probably are, non-existent in the rural areas. And I'm sure you'll hear that over and over.

During discussions and interactions with peers in his counsellor training program, John became aware of the major differences that existed between urban and rural school counselling departments. What impressed John was the compartmentalization and structure upon which the urban school counselling programs were based. In becoming aware of this contrast, he realized how he was expected to remain a generalist in his role as a counsellor in the rural setting.

> Well something that was interesting Pat, was how they had everything compartmentalized in the urban system. I felt that the rural programs had to be much more generic.
> ...it was interesting to me that, you know, a high school counsellor at I believe he was at either ____ or ____, was telling me that if there was a problem with the student's learning, they would just call in the bureau team which was

a psychologist, reading specialist, speech therapist (if they needed it). You know, if there was someone who was having behavior problems well even there were programs set up for that kind of student. I am expected to be a generalist. Take a problem as it comes along and deal with it. I found that would be a real difference.

It also became abundantly clear to John that he did not have the immediate clinical support and specialized programs that were available to counsellors in the urban schools. As a result, he had to remain attentive to his own counselling limitations and the existing resources within his community.

And you sort of try to hold things together until somebody else that has a little bit more knowledge in that area can come along and deal with it. That's probably one thing, you probably have to be more flexible, Pat. You are the person that is... You're the first person that's going to deal with most things. And so, you sort of have to have a pretty good sense of what is in the community.

To ensure that the counselling needs of students were adequately met, John effectively engages and utilizes professionals in existing community resources. He invites the participation and intervention of colleagues who he perceives as better equipped to deal with certain student issues. A positive spin-off of this professional collaboration are the collegial relationships that ultimately emerge.

I make good use of Mental Health Services. The Director of Services is good. He is sort of like ___ in this system. I am

probably overworked and have too much hay on my fork, but make good use of Mental Health Services, AADAC, the various government agencies. Rural people have to rely on people to come in. Like the counsellor that works through mental health will come through maybe twice a month. I know he is coming through and I will sort of load him up.

With supportive colleagues in the community, and the opportunity to network with other school counsellors during monthly meetings, John avoids feeling isolated and alone in his work. A desire to also gain the confidence, trust, respect, and suppon of the administration and teachers is evidenced in John's efforts to establish harmonious collegial relationships. To avoid potential power struggles with his colleagues, John fosters a collaborative working environment and works toward the welfare of the students.

We do have a bit of a support network in that we have a monthly county meeting where all the counsellors can meet. And there is usually a few items on the agenda but also time to sort of share ideas. The one thing about the monthly meeting is it allows some kind of dialogue and collegiality.

I try to foster that kind of relationship too, because I feel that I want the same kind of support and the confidence of the staff. I feel I have it. And that is one thing I am really pleased about.

Performing two functions simultaneously, as a teacher and counsellor, at times proves to be a challenging task for John. Although it appears that the teachers understand and respect his dual role, it is confusing for some students who are being taught and counselled by the same person. A concern that surfaces for John regarding this issue, pertains to the potentiality of jeopardizing his counselling relationship with students.

> You know, it is sometimes tough teaching a student you are also counselling. And I still feel that's (at least for me personally), that is difficult.
>
> I have been in classes where I child who I think I have a good relationship with... I'll come in to teach a unit and see him do the same things he does to his teacher. And so that always a kind of revelation to me. So that was really interesting to me because I think, "Well, ok, I've got a really good relationship with Johnny so I'll go in there and just teach it and everything will be great". And suddenly, Johnny's making noises at the back of the room and doing all the things Johnny does to his teacher.

From John's perspective, his ongoing experience as a classroom teacher has proved advantageous. It serves to augment both his understanding of the teacher's experience and frustrations and his interpersonal relationship with teachers. While functioning in a dual capacity, John perceives his colleagues as appreciative of his versatility and his genuine understanding of the challenges they endure.

> I think it is a real plus. Absolutely! I think that it gives you

a sense of what the teacher is going through. I think they see me as a colleague. Somebody's that's just not taking one student out and doing one to one. I do that alot but I'm capable and able to teach a class or go skating with them. Or if they're doing a cross country run, well, I'll help out. It's us! I think that's really important. I don't know if all settings have that but certainly when you're talking about rural areas you need that because...
But yea, I think teaching gives me an idea of what it is like in the trenches.

Working and living in a small rural community presents some issues pertaining to anonymity and personal privacy for John. Although acknowledging the down side to having a high profile position in a smaller community, John conversely underscores the advantages and positive consequences that also exist. Upon reflecting on his ability to appreciate and accept the cultural mentality of the rural community, John credits his rural background and experience.

You can be quite anonymous in Edmonton or Calgary or Montreal or Toronto. Well, in ____ for example, I am not. Everyone knows who I am which is quite interesting because I met my wife at ____ and we were going out. It is like being in a goldfish bowl in some ways. Everyone knows who you are so, I think that there are some pluses to that and some negatives to that as well. The pluses are that, you know you are part of the community. You can feel it. There's a sense

of community.

I suppose the negatives are that if you go for a beer, everybody knows you've gone for a beer. You stay at your girlfriend's place, everybody knows you've stayed over at your girlfriend's place. So you know, there's some baggage that you carry along.

Realizing the challenges of working and residing in a rural setting, John remains sensitive to the difficult transitional periods that can be experienced by both colleagues and students. In addition to performing work related responsibilities, John recognizes that although covert, he is expected to extend himself to the community. By doing so, he is demonstrating a genuine interest in the community in which he works and lives.

...one of my colleagues, she was quite happy to move to _____ because she could go into the grocery store in _____ and nobody knew who she was. She just bought her stuff and off she went. Whereas I know all the checkout kids at Safeway and I love it! ...I guess maybe I'm small town and that fits well. I don't know.. it might be difficult for a counsellor coming from Toronto let's say, or Vancouver or Montreal to deal with that. I know that the teacher that says she doesn't like being recognized in Safeway is from Vancouver.

You've got to project that sense to the rural people that you're there. You're making a contribution and it's just not,

"I'm just in there for the powers to be".
I would say it would be an added pressure if you weren't naturally that kind of person. It would be an added pressure if you were expected to do those things and it wasn't your nature to do them.

Being recognized and acknowledged by students while in the community is an appealing consequence of John's work as a school counsellor. He especially enjoys being remembered and reconnecting with former students who have gone on to secure professional careers. These rekindled relationships symbolize a sense of continuity for John and are experiences which he finds most rewarding.

So I go into ____ School and there's Shelly. I taught Shelley in high school. You know, we did a career thing together. And then there's Judy, she teaching, you know, grade three. I had her for social studies in grade nine and grade ten. And I think it is great!

A situation that at times, requires John to improvise and use creative counselling skills, involves motivating students who are from prosperous farm families. Due to the lucrative farm industry, John periodically finds himself having to encourage students to complete their academic requirements. In doing so, John is placed in a position of having to advocate the need for formal education with students who are already being handsomely rewarded for their contributions to the family farm.

I can remember talking to a boy in my class and saying, "Listen, this assignment needs to be done (I'm speaking

as a teacher here but it could have been as a counsellor). Your assignment was due last week and you haven't done it. Now you need this course". And he said, "Well really I don't". And I said, "What are you telling me?". He said,"I'm telling you I'm making more money than you right now, so what are you telling me? That I need this course! For what? I want to finish high school but don't tell me that it's so I can get a better job or make something of myself."

Due to the distance between the rural area and urban centers, John feels especially obligated that students are aware of post secondary educational opportunities and alternative careers that exist outside of the rural community. As such, he emphasizes a global picture with students and works toward reminding them of educational and career opportunities that exist in the larger urban centers.

...an understanding of the world of work and careers and what's available for rural kids who are probably going to have to move out of that community if they are going to find meaningful work. That's one thing you have to deal with.

And probably start getting the kids to look at what's happening in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer. So if Red Deer College has an open house, boy, you better be there. And SAIT, NAIT has an open house, well you should have kids going there just to sort of get a sense. And I think prepare them for what it's going to be like

because if you take them there and they're afraid, then it's a step backward.

Overall, John has enjoyed his experience as a rural school counsellor and despite the challenges inherent in this position, he is able to punctuate the many advantages it offers.

But the nice thing about that is ok: so you get Shawn in grade 10, you say, "Shawn, how are you doing? Are you the younger brother of..." And, "yes, I am and I have got two sisters coming along". And so there's some sense of who this child is and their background. Continuity. You sort of know the parents' expectations.

Co-researcher Three: Jane

The experience of residing and working in the same community has proven to be both enjoyable and rewarding for Jane. While acknowledging some of the obvious implications associated with her living circumstances, the fact that she feels connected to her community is personally meaningful.

I know alot of people that's their concern. That everywhere they go there's kids. Which is true in a small town. You go to a restaurant, you go to a fast food place, you go to a grocery store - all the kids are working there and you can't get away from them. And so, if that's something that bothers you, I guess that would be a concern. But it's never been for me.

The prospect of feeling isolated within her community is not cherished by Jane and therefore, her lack of anonymity is not of great personal value or significance. Jane derives a sense of usefulness when she is spontaneously approached by students, while in the community, for advice and direction. Rather than perceiving these interactions as intrusive and bothersome, Jane welcomes the opportunity to participate in the on-going growth and development of her students. Understanding and appreciating the integral role she plays in the academic lives of students allows her to remain flexible and receptive. From the spontaneous interactions with students, Jane has also discovered that she is perceived as being "approachable" by students. It is also confirming to know that students feel comfortable in speaking to her while in the community. Inherent in these interactions, is a sense of relationship continuity that extends beyond the school context. The value Jane places on establishing and maintaining such relationships is apparent in her experience.

> But I do get the grocery store counselling. Mrs. ____, when can I come and see you about this? Or what do I need for this? Which I kind of think is neat too. That the kids feel comfortable doing that. I guess I am perceived as accessible and that sort of thing. Because as I said, when I first started here I was living outside the community and then I moved in. I think I like the feeling of knowing people in your community rather than being anonymous and isolated and that kind of thing. I've never felt like my privacy was at risk.

During times when Jane requires additional space, she realizes that there are opportunities that exist outside of her community to socialize. The flexibility Jane describes, allows her to find a comfortable balance in meeting her personal needs.

> And maybe a factor there is if you don't want to be in that environment, its not far to the city. So I guess if you're going out for a social occasion or whatever, it's not necessarily in the community.

When reflecting on her counselling position within a smaller community, Jane recognizes how her social behavior is constantly observed and evaluated by the community. As such, she perceives rural counsellors as being at a greater risk of jeopardizing their credibility and reputation and therefore, having to be more conscientious of their social conduct. On the other hand, Jane perceives the rural community as more appreciative of her efforts and abilities. Having a high profile means that people are more cognizant of and acknowledge her commitment to students.

> I know that can be a problem you know, because you are always under observation as a professional in a small town. You know, teachers if they're seen to be doing something they shouldn't be doing, it's certainly... it's talked about... But there's a concern about what that does to your reputation as far as your professional skills with other people. So, I suppose in a small town it takes less to damage your credibility and your reputation. So that would be an issue I guess. Although you know, I think in some ways alot

of people are even more appreciative of what you do.

In describing her comfort level regarding social interactions with students, Jane draws a correlation between the support she receives at work and her confidence level when interacting with students outside of the school context. Being content at work appears also to have bolstered her confidence level outside of the school context. Having had positive relationships with students both in school and in the community over the years, has been instrumental in heightening Jane's comfort level. In short, support from her colleagues coupled with positive experiences has prompted her to welcome and encourage meaningful relationships with students.

And that probably all relates - that I am very happy in the situation I'm in, I really like my job, I really like the staff that I'm working with and so I feel quite comfortable in what does happen. And as a result, I am more competent and comfortable in the community I suppose.

I've had very positive experiences with all the students generally, that I've worked with and so I guess that's why I say I don't mind it because I see those interactions as positive rather than interference with my privacy or whatever.

A sense of obligation toward rural students is evident in Jane's experience. She remains concerned about their possible disadvantage in learning about educational and career opportunities in the larger urban centers. As such, she devotes time and energy to ensure that students realize what opportunities exist for them. Keeping abreast with this information however, remains a challenge for Jane. Not having the suffient time to attend update sessions, along with the physical distance

between her place of employment and the post secondary institutions, remains problematic.

> Well, one thing that struck me just before you came was the situation of a student in a rural community in relation to planning for post secondary and what not and wondering whether they are being disadvantaged in any way and trying to avoid that happening as much as possible but it is...
> So you try to be as on top of it as you can and provide the students as much as you can so that they aren't at a disadvantage to those people in the big centers and that kind of thing. But it is a concern.
> But you are always wondering who's been missed or if I could have talked to this one maybe we could have got them motivated to go or, you know, whatever...

Having to advocate for formal education when interacting with young people who are from prosperous farm families continues to surface as a challenge for Jane. In spite of the immediate financial gratification these young people experience, she attempts to remind them about the long term implications and the value of education. In an attempt to motivate this client population, Jane emphasizes the business aspect of farming and the need to adapt to the economic times in the farming industry. Jane remains painfully aware that her efforts in encouraging students to keep their career options open is in direct competition with immediate financial gain.

> There's sometimes a mentality that you deal with farm kids.

That they don't have to think about their future because they're going to take over the business with their father, whatever. And think they don't need any extra training to do that. And realistically, things have changed alot and you know, everybody you talk to is saying you need post secondary training to make it in the farming industry or whatever.

You're looking at a family business... and then quite often those are the kids that are hard to motivate in terms of their academics and their marks and that kind of thing. It's not a priority, the value isn't there.

An appreciation for young people from small rural areas emerges in Jane's experience. Empathizing with their circumstances, she appreciates the adjustment period they require when transitioning to a new school. Embedded in Jane's experience is a compassion and patience for students during transitional periods.

And also I think part of the problem is the junior high they come from in ____ is quite strict and you don't leave the school and these are the rules and so on. Very structured and not that is bad but then they come here and it's like a totally free environment. They are away from their home town, they're away from... and they could do whatever they want and so they try and take advantage of that until they can get reigned in and realize that you can't do that and succeed.

While describing transitional issues of students, Jane remarks on the population of her school and the subsequent opportunities she is provided to become personally acquainted with students. Again, the theme of continuity within relationships emerges in Jane's experience.

> Personally, I think it sort of an ideal situation because it's smaller than the big city schools in terms of you know, being anonymous and just a number and that sort of thing. So you get to know the kids and that sort of thing.

Jane's fascination with and interest in the counselling profession was gradual. Having become familiarized with the counselling process, as a home economics teacher, Jane experienced a desire to contribute to the field of school counselling. As such, she committed herself to formal counsellor training while setting and maintaining high personal standards.

> That's another issue I think in terms of rural counselling. Most, I shouldn't generalize without doing some research, but I would wager that most rural counsellors have little or no training. And usually it is because they need to have a counsellor and so and so wants, you know, some of that free time, you know, that kind of thing. And I think that's unfortunate. It gives counselling a bad name. So that was one of my motivations for going into it was seeing, you know, that there was a need for good counsellors and also wanting to make more of a difference with kids and work one to one with them.

Jane's appreciation for the complexity of the counselling process was a motivating factor in her pursuit of advanced training. Jane's personal integrity and value for professional preparation was evident.

> Well, I do recognize that a big part of successful counselling is personal characteristics and traits that you need to be a good counsellor and that kind of thing. But even from my own experience, I know that only takes you so far. And that if you don't have the background to know where to go from here or to understand how to take the next step or whatever, that you're not going to be impacting very much on the people you're dealing with. So I think you do need some sort of background otherwise, I think it is very easy to do the wrong thing.

While discussing her indoctrination into the counselling profession, Jane elaborates on her commitment to the counselling profession and skill development. Early in her counselling career, Jane faced the challenge of having to gain the respect of her colleagues, altering erroneous perceptions regarding the area of counselling and re-establishing a reputable counselling department.

> Well, when I transferred to high school I had to probably prove myself and develop a reputation because the person that I replaced sort of retired ten years before he retired kind of thing. Again, I think when I started here there was a skeptical image of counselling because they felt it was a used up teaching position that didn't do a whole lot for the

students and so it's difficult when you're dealing with that kind of perception to begin with. I hope that I, and ____ as well, have done something to improve that image and to gain the respect of the teachers. They seem to be very supportive and cooperative of what we do.

Despite the hurdles she encountered, Jane continued to pursue her career goals. In doing so, Jane experienced the support of administration. It was also very clear to her that cooperation between her and her colleagues was essential in order to meet the needs of the students.

Also having another person to consult with and bounce things off of and come up with ideas and that kind of thing. Sometimes I think many counsellors feel like they are on their own and they have ideas but they don't know if anybody else thinks they're good.

Although having to contend with frustrations around the lack of counselling time she has with students, she realizes the pressures that are endured by her teaching colleagues to complete their curriculum. Embedded in Jane's narrative, is a willingness to compromise in order to establish a harmonious and progressive work environment.

There's a bit of frustration in the fact... in terms of accessing students because at the high school level teachers put a premium on their time in the classroom. And if anybody tries to take a piece of that they get upset because they don't have enough time to cover what they are supposed to for the

diploma exams and so forth.

Like we understand their plight too and we don't like cutting into their time and pulling their kids out either. So, you have to find a balance somewhere.

Despite her personal decision to pursue formal training, Jane recognizes the logistical hurdles that rural counsellors face in attempting to enhance their skills. Realizing the improbability of rural counsellors pursuing formal training, Jane highlights and appreciates the efforts of school administration to assist in the provision of informal counselling skill development. In addition, Jane welcomes and embraces the opportunity to participate in networking meetings to avoid professional isolation.

Like they tried to offer some courses in Red Deer that I would have an interest in. But it is a major commitment if you're going to do that and I suppose that's one of the reasons that a lot of people don't. And they just pull from experience and learn on the job.

Even just having someone that you could meet with... again, we're kind of fortunate here because we have a Director of Student Services... tries to get all the counsellors together, address any issues they have and want to talk about. And also you know, provide some kind of assistance, you know, to help us in our jobs whether it's making us aware of the resources that are available...

Because urban centers have those kinds of resources as well

and have lots of people to draw on. If you're isolated out in the small rural setting then that could be very overwhelming and daunting, you know.

While recognizing her own areas of expertise, Jane effectively utilizes existing community resources to ensure that student needs are met. Although she encounters some minor frustrations when doing so, she values the participation of colleagues and finds their intervention reassuring.

The contacts have always been positive. And it's very reassuring to know that those services are available. Probably one of the ongoing concerns is making referrals to the agencies and never knowing what's happened or what's going on or whatever. Not getting the feedback and you know, there's lots of reasons for that. And I think people have been trying to work on improving that with the idea of collaboration and what not.

The current process regarding the alteration of mental health service delivery has created a sense of uncertainty for Jane. Feeling excluded from the consultation process, she questions the wisdom of the decision makers and remarks on the tentative and adversarial atmosphere that the changes have created.

We've really questioned how they've gone about it and who they've included and who they haven't. There was a bit of intimidation in terms of, "are our jobs safe anymore" kind of thing and that automatically creates some tension and adversarial positioning.

Overall, Jane's experience as a rural school counsellor continues to be personally and professionally gratifying. She appreciates the support and recognition she receives from administration, colleagues and the community. As an integral member of a progressive and positive work environment, Jane continues to feel content and optimistic.

> It's been positive and it seems comfortable and safe. I think we're fortunate because I think we have a good school and that comes from the top down. We're on the right track here so my personal experience in this particular school and community has been really positive.

Co-researcher Four: Alana

Upon her entrance into the profession of school counselling, Alana quickly discovered the consequences of working in isolation and without adequate community resources.

> But then you find in the rural areas - especially up north is that you might be the only person there in the school division. And when something like a crisis or whatever comes up you handle it. You learn to handle it. And its either you or no one else.
>
> ...there was nobody else that for like two and half hours down the road. And I found especially in ____ there was a large number of crises.

Due to her circumstances, she found herself in what can be described as overwhelming situations. In addition to having to grapple with immediate student

concerns, the rural area in which she worked began to rapidly grow in population and thus, presented her with additional problems regarding student services.

...and there was alot of transient people and the town was growing alot. It grew by 1500 people in the two years that I was there. And of course, the high school grew and the number of kids grew. And there was one counsellor for... what we did have, about 600 kids. So it was one for 600 in that one school.

And alot of those people... either they couldn't go or they wouldn't go. And so there was no way to get them that assistance.

Being the only school counsellor in the district, Alana had to also contend with requests from other schools. The intensity under which she worked was illustrated by the severity of cases she was expected to deal with. Amidst the problems of students, the rapid turnover in staff seemed to intensify matters.

The turnover in the staff by the end of the first year I, you know... in the second year there were already thirteen people that had less experience in ____ than I did.

I guess the thing was because I was a beginning counsellor and I thought, "Well, am I going to know how to handle these situations?" Like especially crisis ones like suicide, like ____ had a really high teen pregnancy rate and sexually transmitted diseases, and you know, how do you handle all these things? And I thought, "It would be nice to bounce

these ideas off somebody. Am I going about this the right way? You know, the principal was really good. He was a good guy. But then he left.

There was the odd time I got called down to the elementary alright. So, like grade one, two... they are alot different than working with grade seven through twelve. It was a junior/senior high. You know, I hadn't taken a course on child therapy, and so the techniques you want to use are quite alot different.

Within a short period of time, she realized how drastic an effect such a working environment could have on school personnel. She came to appreciate the career plans of her colleagues along with their coping strategies. Without the needed support and resources, she began to set realistic and manageable goals for herself in order to cope and function effectively within he job.

You went there for two years, you got your permanent certificate and you went to someplace that was a little more sane - is what you did. It's like you get thrown into a swimming pool and if you don't know how to swim you know... either you are going to swim and survive and make it to the edge or you are just going to drown and die.

...I know after that first year I wanted to leave there so badly.

Just the lack of support is really difficult. And I guess the thing was in alot of the rural areas maybe you go into... like

before they had the vice principal who was the counsellor and so they really hadn't had a trained person there. So basically I went in there and set up the program, you know.

Despite the hardship and disadvantages of working independently, Alana began to recognize the positive features that were associated with her situation.

The opportunities which were made available to her were personally valued and her expertise was acknowledged by colleagues. Feeling useful, appreciated, and with more experience, Alana carefully considered her career options and agreed to extend her contract.

On the one hand that was really nice because you get alot of responsibility and you can do... I could basically do whatever I want or what I saw fit. Now the first thing I did was I did a needs assessment because I didn't know what these people or what these kids needed and that gave me alot of direction and that was good. And so I mean I didn't think I was really revolutionary because people in the city had been doing this for a long time. But there, they thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. So you know, and I remember after the first year I thought, "This place is insane, I don't know if I can, you know, handle another year up here". But you know, they offered me this contract. So then I got this contract and I could have stayed forever there.

It appears that after having survived the initial onslaught of her first year, she gained the necessary confidence to continue within such a demanding environment. During the very difficult times which she experienced, Alana valued the moral support and direction which she received from school administration. In retrospect she realized how this support helped her to function and maintain a positive perspective on counselling.

> There was alot of support from other teachers. It's funny you go up to a place like that and most of the other teachers are young... you're all in the same boat. You are all starting. So you would have eight or nine first year teachers there or first year people. So they are all going through the same kind of hell.
>
> But I'm really lucky here because my principal and my vice principal are really supportive. And if there was something I want to go to or whatever, they'll arrange it so I could. So I'm really fortunate.

While interacting with students and their families throughout her career, Alana is touched by the unfortunate circumstances they endure. She describes the hardships they encounter and how these life situations affect the children with whom she works. In describing the plight of these students and their families, Alana's caring and sensitivity surfaces.

> You get alot of disparity like some of the kids are really, really well off and some of them are really, really poor. Like you notice that moreso here in ____. The people

who live in ____ here alot of them are on social services, on welfare. And Edmonton, you know, they've been paid to come out and live here. So ____ is basically a welfare town. So you can get parents and families and kids that are very, very poor.

The importance of remaining involved in actual classroom teaching is underscored by Alana. In order to maintain her credibility with colleagues, as well as keeping a pulse on classroom behaviour, she realizes how important it is to maintain a teaching load. Embedded in this choice, Alana realizes the importance of camaraderie and the support of her colleagues. As such, she understands that remaining involved in the classroom is one way to stay connected within her peer group.

I teach three times a week and that's just about right, I think. I think that's good that I stay in the classroom, partially. Because I think, number one ok, well that subject material is good. And that's fully within my realm. That's no problem. But number two, I think it gives you more credibility with the other teachers too. Because I think sometimes you run the risk of them saying, "'k, you work with one, two, three, four... you know, however many kids in an hour or whatever. You don't have thirty-five kids with you. So what are you doing?" ...But being in the classroom, I understand what they're going through and some of the problems they have and so I don't think I

would ever want to totally lose touch with being in the classroom.

During the course of her career, Alana has periodically considered her career options. While doing so, she has weighed the advantages and disadvantages of working independently within a small school district. One appealing feature which she has considered relates to her potential membership within a larger counselling department.

That's funny, I guess I've always worked alone. Like I wondered about what it would be like to work in the city and maybe work with more people or have a counselling department. I am the department! And you know, I wondered what would that be like. And I wonder if... you see I kind of like working on my own and I don't know if that's the way it was when I started or if I've just developed that.

Within this internal dialogue however, she realizes the degree to which she values her autonomy and uniqueness. Consequently Alana has decided on several occasions to remain working in a smaller school despite the apparent advantages that might exist within a larger counselling department.

Residing and working in the smaller community has at times, created a level of discomfort for Alana. In her experience, a transgression of boundaries emerge between she and her students and other residents in the community.

And the one thing about the privacy is interesting in ____ there wasn't very much at all. Like you would go down to

the grocery store and people saw you - "Oh, you're the counsellor". So, like I'm just trying to buy some bananas here guys! And you know, they would start asking me things you know. Or, "I have this you know" or "Can you see my kid about this?" You were actually kind of known. I wouldn't say... I wasn't a celebrity.

Or kids would phone me up in ____. Or they would come visit my apartment. Like everybody knew where I lived. And like they thought, "Oh it's ok, we'll just drop in on Ms. ____. You know, I didn't mind the odd call. I mean that was ok, but when they start dropping into your apartment. But yea, that's how I deal with kind of privacy and having a life. You leave here is what you do. I supposed if I hunted and fished and I don't know if I had a ranch or something, but I'm really not into that. So, maybe I would stick around more but, I don't know.

In an effort to secure personal space and protect her reputation and credibility, she finds that she has to isolate herself or leave the community entirely. The added pressure she experiences to uphold her reputation as a single female intensifies matters. Alana's concerns around anonymity and privacy are validated and reinforced by many of her colleagues who chose to live outside of the community.

But, I think people would look badly upon me if I was... like, now I don't drink alcohol or anything anyways but I wouldn't go to the bars out here. And you know, if I had

some... I don't think I would even... well,, I don't know, I wonder... I was thinking like if I met some good looking guy from out here and starting going out with him out here... I don't know, I'd have to think about that too.
well, they like the services and lifestyle better. But part of it is I suppose is they can do more of what they want and they don't have to worry about people gossiping about them.

Although Alana holds people in her community in high regard, she remains cognizant that many adhere to traditional views regarding gender and the role of women in society. Knowing that her students are influenced by these prevalent views, Alana strives to provide students with alternative perspectives to consider. While doing so, she skillfully challenges prevalent views in an attempt to create conversational space with students.

But you have to watch out here because... especially the males, they are fairly western... there's red neck people out here. Especially the males. And I don't know, I think they still think... they have certain beliefs about how women should be treated and you know, a woman's place... there's the odd time but most of the time like the boys here - the older boys - they'll just be kidding. But they sort of believe some of that. You know, like the way they treat girls and stuff like that.
I think the boys kind of... a little earlier sort of think about

> their careers more than the girls do. But the girls I really have to work on because I say to them, "Look, you know, if you... oh, I'll get married and I'll live happily ever after" - I'll say, "Look, it isn't always happily ever after. Sometimes prince charming is a frog. And what are you going to be left with?"

Invested in advancing her counselling skills, while remaining abreast with current trends, locating appropriate supervision presents as an issue for Alana. As such, she remained goal oriented and persistent in order to meet her own personal and professional needs.

> I had just finished my masters degree, so no wonder they snapped me up. They probably thought who's this sucker with this masters, nobody comes up here with a masters. But, anyways, at that point I wanted to pursue being a chartered psychologist and there was no one, of course, to supervise me there. And being in a bigger division that had someone who could supervise you. That was a big thing. That was something they didn't have in the other district. So, that is big.

As Alana shared her story, it became more apparent that she experienced the continuity and intimacy with students as being very meaningful. Having the opportunity to become closely involved in their daily lives and their decision making process created a feeling of association. This sense of continuity and of

being useful, extended to her interactions and involvement with parents. As such, while working with parents she felt acknowledged and that she was making a valuable contribution.

> Well, I think the biggest advantage is, and some of the kids think it is a disadvantage, but it isn't, is that the staff and people get to know them really well. We get to know their families. And now that I have been here ____ years, I know alot of history now and sort of where some of these things come from. And so when something comes up I'll say, "Hum, hum" or I'm not surprised or it doesn't floor me, you know.
>
> That's actually... I call it one of my most fun jobs. Because actually, doing that academic advising but the kids like that because they've known me for four years, they feel comfortable about that. Alot of them are scared to go there anyways. But just to add, I think you can have a more personalized level of service.
>
> You know if a parent calls me. ok I'm the only one "boom" they know who to call ok. And so it's really easy. Parent has a question "boom" they know, "Oh, we're going to call Alana".

Alana's determination and devotion to students was evidenced in her willingness to organize and participate in field trips that were designed to increase opportunities for students. While remaining sensitive to the life circumstances of

her students, she creatively prompted them to consider and explore options outside of the rural community. During this process, Alana felt a particular obligation to the young females who had a tendency to fall in line with traditional expectations of women in the smaller community. At the same time, she was faced with the challenge of inviting young males to entertain a more global picture and employment possibilities.

> ...they had a post secondary week this year, they hadn't done that. So we just got a bus load of kids together, mostly grade 12's but some 11's - we took them in for the day. And that was a good experience.
> Alot of them... you're right about that they're fairly sheltered, you know and their range of experience maybe isn't as great as you would see in the city. I would even say my kids, some of them are fairly naive. Fairly naive, they go into the city and I'll say, "You just take a bus, you go on the LRT". They go, "bus?".

Alana's enthusiasm and genuine concern for students was also demonstrated in her positive approach. Refusing to succumb into a pessimistic forecast regarding employment opportunities, she remained future-oriented while motivating students. She candidly discusses the energy and time it takes to maintain this position. Her commitment to the school counsellor role and her interest in student development was also evident in her involvement in extracurricular activities.

> Oh yea, and that's what keeps them going is that future because some of them are not very sure about the present.

And so, I try to get them to look into the future. But you know, I sort of think a person in a rural school, it's alot of... you have to have alot of energy. You're also doing all of the extracurricular things. Like I coach badminton, I've coached... what else have I done here? I've coached alot of the sports teams here.

Alana has come to realize the myriad of roles that school counsellors are expected to play. Upon reflection, she recognizes that much of her knowledge has been generated from her work experience and direct service to students and their families. She has a greater appreciation for the school counsellor's position in the rural area being a generalist. In order for the counsellor to function effectively, support from all levels (administration, peers and community) is deemed necessary. When sharing this perspective, Alana confirms the support she receives in order to successfully fulfill her responsibilities.

Yea, you stick around here long enough, you get to be the head of all these little things...

The lack of community resources continues to contribute to a sense of professional isolation for Alana. Without an established and stable network with which to collaborate, she finds herself unable to share concerns and provide support regarding student needs. Having worked toward creating a good working relationship with her peers at work however, appears to have offset some of Alana's isolation. Alana also values the professionals who have remained in the community and appreciates the opportunity she has to consult. Nurturing and

sustaining positive relationships is regarded as important for both herself and the students she serves.

We used to have an inter-agency out here with the FCSS and we used to meet about four or five times a year. It was really good to touch base with your other resources. And once the FCSS got cut, we lost that, the lady that ran it and now we really don't have an interagency anymore. So, I feel a little bit more isolated right now than I did.

...there's good relationships between the school and the physicians which is really important. ... We also have a family- school liaison worker that works in this west end and she's very good. She's a social worker but it's nice to have that other person there to bounce ideas off of.

In not having access to specialized clinical services in the rural area, Alana expresses her concern about the potential increase of psychological problems among young people. She empathizes with community families who are unable to commute long distances for appropriate services.

But AADAC, like that is kind of the big concern I've had this year. We have more grade nine's using drugs and alcohol. ...I would like an addictions specialist out here is what I would like. Because I mean, it isn't very far to ___ but, alot of these people don't have a car. Or they don't have the time.

In a final reflection, Alana underscores the rich experiences and challenges that have emerged from her work in the rural area - experiences and challenges that she continues to enthusiastically embrace. She clearly identifies the ability to work independently, the ability to remain organized and the ability to assume a great deal of responsibility as being key elements of the rural counsellor. The experiences which Alana recounted have culminated in a personal sense of competency and confidence.

> Oh I'm sure there are things that I dealt with and had to deal with, I'm sure I would have never gotten them in the city. But I suppose, it's been good.
>
> Just to summarize, to think about if there's themes, I would say: usually you're alone so you have to be responsible, and you have to be organized and well planned. You have to take on responsibility. Sometimes the lack of support. You get alot of responsibility.
>
> I mean this has been such a great experience being in a rural area and not much throws you after awhile. You know after ____ years of this like there's almost nothing that will shock me anymore - almost. What else can a person drop on my head. You know, what haven't I seen.

Co-researcher Five: Kaye

As the new counsellor, Kaye was greeted with the public's unfavorable reaction to a perceived controversial subject matter which she was asked to introduce into the school curriculum. Although realizing that much of the reaction was based on

unfounded misconceptions and fears, she remained sensitive and vigilant to both the community and to the systemic effect this response had on school administration. A consequence of this of predicament resulted in Kaye feeling that her work and conduct was under the watchful eye of her superior. As such, she had to contend with undue pressure and anxiety.

> So the principal was kind of antsey about what was going to go on here. I was new-someone who came from the city where there's not that same kind of ... I don't think you have to... You don't have that same sense of being watched quite so closely by these different groups.

The community's general uneasiness regarding the course matter that she was introducing was also extended toward counselling. It was Kaye's impression that many families within the smaller community were very skeptical of counselling and preferred to maintain clear boundaries about the sharing of family matters and business. Realizing how prevalent this sentiment was throughout the community, Kaye found herself operating in a cautious manner. As a result, to honor the values of the families with whom she worked, and to avoid unnecessary conflict, she was very careful in how she communicated with students.

> And then also I think the other thing I noticed there was like... people weren't real open to counselling at that time. You know the old, "What goes on in our family, stays in our family and don't go telling at school". Whereas in some ways that's good because you have that strong family feeling. At the same time there were kids who wanted to

deal with issues who didn't always feel they had the freedom to do that.

You just had this feeling that you had to be careful. Or even be careful in terms of what you said to a kid. That they could then take home and maybe say to the parent in some other form, you know their interpretation. And then you would be called on the carpet.

The job related pressure experienced by Kaye was instrumental in her decision to create boundaries for her own well being. As a way of securing personal space and privacy, Kaye intentionally took up residence outside of the community in which she worked. To preserve her anonymity and to separate her counselling role from her family life, Kaye deliberately separated herself emotionally and physically from the community in which she worked.

I think I've been really lucky that I've never lived in the community where I counselled. I say I'm lucky in that when I go home... I actually live in _____. I can go home and get out of the counsellor role and just be myself there. So, after dealing with kids in school I don't have to be the counsellor.

I don't know, I've just always considered myself lucky that I could separate my two roles. So I think you would be, you know, kind of under the microscope a little bit as the counsellor.

This arrangement has been helpful in assisting Kaye to avoid the awkwardness inherent in spontaneous social interactions involving her and the parents of her students. Although Kaye is protective of her own anonymity, she also realizes the dilemma of parents and appreciates their need for confidentiality.

> ...like what I am talking about is sometimes, say parents that you worked with or worked with their kids will run into the grocery store and pretend they don't know you. You know, that kind of thing where there's some discomfort level. Where they don't want to be running into you or seeing you in a social situation.. when they've had confidential dealings with you.

Another dimension pertaining to Kaye's concern regarding the lack of privacy relates to how people within the community tend to observe the behaviour and parenting practices of professionals. Through her narrative it became apparent that Kaye sensed that she and her family's life would be restricted and judged by community residents. In addition to experiencing the scrutiny of the community, Kaye is cognizant that the work of the school counsellor can also be misunderstood by colleagues. Her underlying concerns have to do with colleagues misinterpreting how she manages her time and misunderstanding what is entailed in her work.

> Well, maybe that's partly what I've avoided by not wanting to ever live in the town. I don't know. I think there would be a little bit of watching of your family - children. Something like the minister's kid. In terms of other

expectations. I don't know other than like I said already the confidentiality and privacy being a huge issue. I think that would be one of the acid tests you would have to pass. Well, in every position that I have been in, whether it's in the city or in the country I've been really aware that a counsellor can really run the danger of looking as if they are not doing anything.

Kaye alludes to having to portray an image that is expected of a school counsellor. The division between teachers and counsellors becomes more apparent as Kaye shares her story. In Kaye's opinion, the regular classroom teacher's lack of understanding regarding the daily functioning of the counsellor perpetuates the uneasiness she sometimes experiences.

So I very seldom spend time sitting in the staff room which means I seldom take a spare you know, as other teachers might. I might stop and talk to someone for ten minutes or so. Because I think your work is not really as visible.

And I'm not sure staff always understand the other part is part of your work as well as just seeing students. So I guess what I'm saying is that you have to be aware of the kind of image you are projecting in the school. And whereas I am busy all day, I also have to be aware that I have to look busy. Or look like I'm doing something.

Having to extend herself to meet the needs of her colleagues is a frequent occurrence experienced by Kaye. When colleagues come up against challenging moments with students, Kaye is considered a valuable resource. As such, she has the added responsibility of assisting her colleagues with strategizing the management of classroom behaviours. The general lack of understanding of counselling however, often eventuates in teachers expecting rapid student attitudinal and behavioural change once Kaye has intervened. To further complicate matters, Kaye also has to contend with teachers who, albeit well intended, attempt to dictate the content and course of the counselling process. In perceiving the counsellor as a disciplinarian [italics added], teachers have expectations and when these expectations are not met, their frustration surfaces. Unfortunately, Kaye is sometimes the recipient of this frustration.

> And you know, I've been here for quite a few years now so I'm pretty pleased about how I work with the staff. But the biggest one is the quick fix. ...you know, when you get a kid there is sometimes a fair bit of research and delving into things before you even really understand what's going on with that student. You read records, you talk to teachers. You know, do all the background stuff. And staff doesn't always understand that number of hours that go into that part of it.

With the support of administration, Kaye devotes a good deal of energy into clarifying her role with students and colleagues so that her position will not be compromised. The inherent challenge of this task becomes illuminated when

considering Kaye's ongoing effort to establish and nurture relationships with her colleagues.

> In the school, I have to be really careful not to let myself be set up that way. And make it clear to the staff and the administration. So there's not a problem with that. That I'm not the one who sees kids who are in trouble or they don't get sent to the counsellor when the teachers throw them out of class in the same way they would get sent to the office for discipline.

To maintain credibility with her colleagues and to stay in touch with the daily challenges of classroom instruction, Kaye recognizes the importance of her teaching duties. While performing the dual role of teacher/counsellor, Kaye shares the challenges that she encounters. Altering roles from being a teacher who is in charge [italics added] to the counsellor who is expected to create a different milieu can be particularly difficult. Nevertheless, Kaye is aware of the credibility that comes with maintaining teaching responsibilities and actual classroom participation.

> At the same time I think, to have a little bit of teaching maintains your credibility with the rest of the staff, and keeps you in touch. So you know what it's like to be in a classroom with kids. ...and I think teaching experience is necessary. You're going to have trouble dealing with reality of it plus maintain your credibility with the rest of the staff.

Yea, sometimes it could be impossible. You go into the classroom and you have to be the person in control. You Have to be the disciplinarian.

That's the other real disadvantage in working with that many classes. There are bound to be people that I have to discipline and people that I don't like very much in a teaching situation, and they didn't like me as a teacher. That really interfered with the counselling role to the point that these students that I sometimes knew I couldn't work with just because I couldn't get myself in another role.

The lack of community support services for students and their families is an ongoing concern in terms of meeting student needs. Although appropriate resources exist in the larger urban centers, ensuring that students attend assessments or interviews is another matter. As a result, Kaye can only strongly recommend to parents that they arrange for appropriate service and follow through with appointments. Realizing the hardships that are associated with the lack of resources, Kaye works toward establishing and maintaining positive relationships with community professionals. When appropriate, she is not hesitant to utilize available resources in order to meet the needs of students. The issue of minimal resources generates a general feeling of powerlessness for Kaye. Realizing the limitations that face her, she remains realistic and welcomes close collaboration and support from colleagues.

Well, that's the one big difference I can see between

rural and city that we just don't have the resources that you do in the city.

We've had the odd kid assessed by ____ but you have to have a parent who's motivated enough to get them there.

And within the school division we have family liaison workers, which is a fairly recent addition and really Helpful. We can sit down with another professional and toss around problems that you have.

To offset the isolation and lack of resources, Kaye is aware of the learning opportunities available to her. To augment these opportunities she participates in an ongoing peer group that serves to reduce her sense of isolation and provides a context wherein she can connect and share ideas with other rural school counsellors. While describing this facet of her job, the value which Kaye places on team work surfaces. Being a member of a larger group is considered a valuable opportunity for Kaye.

Up until last year we had an assistant superintendent, her responsibility was student services. So we would get together as a counselling group three or four times a year for the purpose of sharing, updating.

I think that's one of the things that i notice most is the kind of isolation we can experience as the only school counsellor in the school.

You know, when I worked in the city, you always had a

partner, there were always two of you. To be the only one in the school is hard. So its always been really good to get together.

A feature of the rural community which appeals to Kaye is the support and involvement of parents regarding her work and the educational needs of children. She is often struck by the genuine gratitude and appreciation which is extended to her. Although Kaye realizes that parents value her expertise and commitment to students, she is sometimes surprised by the degree of appreciation she receives.

And then afterwards, if I phone and talk to the parent about what I've done or how I see the problem, they're so appreciative. And they'll say,"Oh. I appreciate what you've done!" And I almost want to stop and say,"Well, what do you think I'm here for?"

Now, the other side of that, I guess I'm talking about parents, is for those kids who are in trouble, there's the same kind of lack of parental involvement that I think you see in the city.

An interesting circumstance that Kaye witnesses pertains to parents who have become disappointed with the rural community and as such, display a lack of interest in the educational aspect of their children's lives. It has been Kaye's experience that many of these families have relocated from the larger city only to find the same social problems they attempted to avoid.

Having the opportunity to experience continuity with families is perceived as a definite advantage for Kaye. In having had the opportunity to work with the same

family over the years, a closeness and bonding tends to evolve which makes her job that much more enjoyable and gratifying.

Looking back on her experience, Kaye has a better understanding regarding the personal characteristics that are useful in helping a professional adjust to the rural community. In short, she admires individuals who, while having a high profile, are comfortable with immersing themselves into community activities. Kaye, on the other hand, has preferred to maintain a physical distance to secure her privacy.

> I guess one of the biggest things, and this ties in, is the confidentiality is sometimes a harder thing to deal with in a small town than it is in the city just because you know people in a different sense. And Maybe me, as a city girl, I've had trouble.

As a result, her participation and social contribution takes place outside of the community in which she works. Kaye attributes some of the difficulty she has had in integrating work and social life to the fact that she was raised in the city and therefore, she remains unaccustomed to the cultural mores within the smaller rural community.

> I guess, when you're in a public position, like a school counsellor,,, that you just have to be aware that you have a high profile. The biggest problems, that I've had, one stands out... have been confidentiality issues.

The following chapter elaborates on the salient themes that emerged from the previous interviews. In doing so, the experiences of each co-researcher is considered in the context of the overall analysis.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

When analyzing the research data, eight common themes emerged pertaining to: (1) privacy and anonymity, (2) isolation, (3) performing a dual role, (4) community networking, (5) community resources, (6) formal training opportunities, (7) peer and administrative support and, (8) continuity of relationships. Although these themes appeared in varying degrees among the co-researchers, the way in which they recurred was striking thus suggesting similar experiences among the co-researchers. As demonstrated in this chapter, there are also many similarities between the literature and what is reported by the co-researchers.

Theme I: Privacy and Anonymity

Each co-researcher identified the lack of anonymity as a significant issue which they encountered as a professional in the rural community. The high profile they described was attributed to being a school counsellor. It was further revealed that the logical consequence of their elevated profile within the community was a decrease in privacy. Saba (1991) reports, "Everybody knows everybody on and off the job. An isolated area results in frequent contact between all individuals, and whether for security or some sense of belonging, individuals notice and monitor the habits of each other" (p. 323). Although this common theme emerged, the ways in which it was perceived by individual co-researchers varied as illustrated below.

John and Jane, for example, were not troubled by their high profile and regarded their heightened visibility as something that is simply associated with being in a prominent position within a smaller community. Debbie, Alana and Kaye, on the other hand, experienced the lack of anonymity as a definite drawback.

For these three women it seemed that a lack of anonymity translated into a curtailment of personal space and freedom. Debbie, for instance, struggled with and grew increasingly resentful toward the constraining forces she experienced. Feeling unsafe and restricted she found herself guarded, cautious and wanting to become "invisible". A personal desire to become less central within the small community may however, conflict with the assimilation process discussed by McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings (1984) who indicate that rural counsellors are often required to increase their visibility within the community in overcoming social-cultural barriers. Alana expressed an uncertainty about how she might be perceived by community residents during social activities. It was quite evident from listening to her that she had given a great deal of thought to this issue and the possible ramifications that were associated with participating in activities that were looked upon unfavorably. The reaction described by Alana is reflected by Keller & Prutsman (1982) who punctuate the conservative social and moral expectations that are characteristic of the rural community. It has been noted that professionals need to carefully consider particulars such as: dress, politics, religion, sexual preference, marital status, drinking habits and so on in the rural community (Murray & Keller, 1991).

Kaye immediately noticed attitudinal differences between urban and rural cultures when accepting a counselling position in the rural area.. More specifically, she was struck by the community's reaction, skepticism and resistance to the introduction of contemporary curriculum material and to counselling in general. Among others (e.g., Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner, 1985; Furlong, 1980; Helge, 1985; Huebner & Huberty, 1984; McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1990;

Saba, 1991), Murray (1984) emphasizes the need for counsellors to, "...understand the political, social, and cultural history of rural development, values, beliefs, and formal and informal structures of the rural community as well as data concerning such things as psychopathology and stress" (p. 228). Based on the general mood of the community, and a concern that the community would associate her with the curriculum which she was introducing, she became quite protective of her personal space. Wanting to avoid having school related business affect her social and family life, she intentionally created boundaries for herself and her family by living outside of the community in which she worked. Early in her experience as a rural school counsellor, Kaye recognized that entering into the community spotlight would be an invitation for close scrutiny and therefore, unnecessary added pressure. The fear of a restricted lifestyle further prompted Kaye to physically distance herself from the community.

Professional Reputation

Although there was a variation regarding how each co-researcher experienced the issue of anonymity, a common concern about maintaining a positive image and reputation within the community surfaced. The potential problems associated with rumors, that tend to spread quickly through smaller communities, was underscored by Debbie. Similarly, the effect of rumors was alluded to by Jane who believed that it took less [italics added] in a smaller area to damage one's professional reputation. Alana, on the other hand, experienced situations where she felt that she was being drawn into [italics added] interactions with community residents that could potentially compromise confidentiality and her reputation. As a result, she became skeptical about spontaneous social interactions and determined that

boundaries needed to be demarcated and carefully monitored. The inherent challenge in doing so however, involved distancing herself without appearing disrespectful of community residents.

Community Observation and Evaluation

As outlined in chapter 2, the issue of being constantly observed, evaluated and vigilant about one's social conduct was raised by each co-researcher. McIntire, Marion & Quaglia (1990) remark that rural educators, "...are usually well known and regularly observed by their constituents" (p. 169). John, for example, described living and working in the smaller community as being similar to being in a gold fish bowl [italics added] wherein what he did was common knowledge. Kaye drew the analogy of living the life of a minister's kid [italics added]. The implications associated with having a high profile within a smaller town has been noted in the literature (e.g., Huebner & Huberty, 1984). According to Murray & Keller (1991) anonymity is virtually impossible for counsellors working in small towns. The levels of anxiety endured by each co-researcher hinged on personal circumstances. With Alana, the issue of gender was raised and was presented as an additional concern. As a single female, she sensed that different community expectations were placed upon her. More specifically, she was circumspect about the places she went and activities she in which participated. During her reflection, Alana wondered about whether or not having a common interest with the rural residents (e.g., hunting) would have made a difference. For the most part, a practical solution arrived at by the co-researchers was to spend time in the city where they would become less visible.

Spontaneous Interactions

Of the five co-researchers, John and Jane considered spontaneous social interactions as a natural outgrowth of their work and were not adverse to freely engaging with students/parents outside of the school context. The sense of connection and continuity that resulted from these interactions was identified as being a valuable and necessary component of their work. Furthermore, being approached outside of the school context was perceived as an indication that students had confidence in them and that they were viewed as accessible and approachable.

Being sought by students and parents reinforced Jane and John's internal sense of usefulness and true community involvement. The importance of feeling useful and valuable as a rural school counsellor is supported by Sutton & Southworth (1990). Jane, for instance, stated that she was much more interested in being part of the community rather than securing her anonymity and remaining isolated. Through her story it was evident that the support and acceptance that she experienced at work greatly influenced her willingness to welcome and engage in spontaneous social interactions. It seemed that her sense of competency heightened when she was encouraged by colleagues to extend herself in the community. Overall, both John and Jane found spontaneous interactions gratifying and that being part of their community offset some of their diminished anonymity. Kaye was alone in addressing the awkwardness of parents during social encounters. According to Kaye, parents demonstrated an anxiety to which she associated the issue of confidentiality.

Violations of Privacy

Of the co-researchers, Jane and John were the least concerned about drawing a distinction between work and social interactions. In their opinion, there existed a natural flow from one context to the other. It should be mentioned however, that neither John nor Jane had ever encountered incidents which they perceived as violations of their personal space. As result, they were not hesitant to respond and extend themselves to students and their parents in social contexts. In contrast, Alana had experienced incidents, including unwelcome telephone calls and unannounced visits from students, that were perceived as direct transgressions of personal boundaries. As such, she began to retreat to secure the little privacy she felt she had left. Clearly, the reaction of each co-researcher was dependent upon their personal interpretation of the interaction.

A personal sense of vulnerability experienced by both Debbie and Kaye prompted them to take extra precautions to increase their anonymity and privacy. With both Debbie and Kaye, there was an uneasy community mood to which they were sensitive and upon which they based their decision.

Of all the co-researchers, John was the only individual who was not raised in a city and who was accustomed to the rural community and its lifestyle. It was considered a natural occurrence to him when approached spontaneously and to become actively involved in local activities. As such, he was comfortable with attention he received. John also indicated that in order to receive the endorsement from the rural community, it was important that professionals demonstrate their commitment at the local level. This translates into the counsellor extending himself or herself beyond the boundaries of the school (Allen & James, 1990). This

perspective is affirmed by McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings (1984) who state that, "Ideally, these activities should be high-visibility functions such as presentations in school social gatherings, helping with scouting activities, and so forth. Visibility may also be attained by seeking coverage in the local media" (p. 583). These authors go on to note however, that high community visibility has been identified as a factor leading to attrition among rural counsellors. Of the remaining co-researchers, Jane appeared to evolve into the comfort level that she was enjoying. Although she was not raised in the rural area, over time she came to accept rural habits and discovered the value in it. She apparently discovered her ability to adjust and identify with the inherent positive features of the non-urban culture. Throughout the literature pertaining to rural counselling and psychology, the need for the professional to adjust is continuously underscored (e.g., Huebner & Huberty, 1984; Murray, 1984)

Theme II: Sense of Isolation

The issue of isolation among rural professionals has received wide acknowledgment throughout the literature as discussed in chapter 2. Periods of isolation were experienced by the co-researchers within the workplace, in terms of their professional development or both.

Workplace

Being part of a small counselling department meant that the co-researchers had no counterparts with whom they could interact on a daily basis and form their own distinct professional identity. For a variety of reasons, forming an alliance with teachers was not an easy task and more often than not, their perceived professional differences amplified the distance between them.

Due to their unique positions within their schools, Debbie and Kaye in particular, often felt outside of their collegial team. The experience of feeling alone within the school context has been described by Sutton (1988) who contends:

> Counselors often face physical isolation in their job (e.g., one-to-one counseling in a closed room). They also are placed in psychological isolation by virtue of their training and the way they perform their job (e.g., they may tend to behave differently toward students than other staff members). p. 17

According to Sutton (1988), the combination of physical and psychological isolation can have a deleterious effect on both the functioning of the school counsellor and the counselling program. Sensing some friction between themselves and their colleagues, Debbie and Kaye both decided to avoid potential conflict by withdrawing and remaining inconspicuous. Kaye, for example, was careful to project a certain image that portrayed busyness when in the presence of her colleagues.

Professional Development

The logistical obstacles that prevented the co-researchers from engaging in training opportunities resulted in a sense of isolation. The inability to attend formal training on an ongoing basis removed them further from a feeling of association with their professional counterparts. The concern regarding the geographic factors that inhibit counsellors from accessing continuing education opportunities has been acknowledged (e.g., Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner,

1985; Huebner & Huberty, 1984; McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings, 1984; Sutton, 1988).

Theme III: Performing A Dual Role

In an early paper, Ivey (1977) asserted that counsellors were becoming teachers, additionally he wrote:

> Increasingly, it may be anticipated that the professional counsellor will be doing more preventative teaching [italics original] and less remedial counselling. This does not imply an opposition between counselling and psychoeducation. Rather, it implies that counsellors will need to find a new balance in their work efforts. p. 23

West (1977) supported this view suggesting that future counsellors would be more involved in a teaching capacity. It was further proposed by Herman (1973), in somewhat of an alarmist tone, that school counsellors either become more involved in the schooling process or face extinction. Various issues that were related to functioning as a teacher and school counsellor were raised by the co-researchers throughout this study. To a large degree, the inherent difficulty of changing roles was identified as a major concern. Transitioning from a teacher's role where they assumed an authoritarian position to the counselling role, where they worked toward creating a very different milieu, was a personal challenge and difficult task. Although aware of their own frustration, the co-researchers also acknowledged and were sensitive to the difficulty this transition presented for students. The confusion that can emerge for students, along with the potential problems associated with this transition, was emphasized. Concern was expressed regarding how the counselling relationship could be strained and jeopardized when

counsellors have to change roles and personalities. Conversely, John described his amazement with how quickly student behaviors could fluctuate between the counselling office and the classroom context ultimately, affecting the dynamics within the counselling relationship. Just when he thought he had established a mutualiy respectful relationship with a student, the student's attitude and behavior within the classroom would quickly alter his perception.

On the other hand, all co-researchers unanimously agreed that monitoring a teaching role was valuable for two primary reasons. First, it added to their credibility among peers and administration and second, it provided them with an opportunity to broaden their scope while keeping a pulse on student behaviors and the daily challenges experienced by teachers.

In terms of credibility, it was the general feeling of the co-researchers that the counsellor's role is often misunderstood and underestimated by misinformed colleagues and administration. As a result, counsellors may be perceived as having a less demanding job since they do not have to contend with large groups of students and mounds of marking, preparation, etc. Jane, in particular, found herself having to gain the respect of her colleagues while working toward establishing a reputable counselling program. Due to misconceptions, resentment can grow toward the school counsellor and their perceived lack of responsibility. Maintaining a teaching role however, was perceived as instrumental in alleviating some of the resentment. When actively involved in the classroom, it appears that teachers appreciate that the counsellor is also experiencing the demands and stresses of teaching.

Additionally, by remaining active in teaching the co-researchers are afforded the opportunity to ensure that critical information is appropriately transferred to the students. By assuming a teaching role they are also maintaining an insider [italics added] perspective and are reminded of the difficulties experienced by their peers.

Overall, maintaining a teaching role provided a useful bridge between teachers/ administrators and counsellors. The one-sidedness of this arrangement however, is obvious. Stated differently, teachers do not get the opportunity to experience the challenge of counselling. As such, as pointed out by Kaye, teachers tend to have a misconception of exactly what is included in the counselling process. Subsequently, teacher frustration can surface when what they think should happen doesn't materialize. Both Debbie and Kaye expressed particular concern about being perceived and labelled as disciplinarians [italics added] by peers and more importantly, students. In an effort to establish a trusting relationship with students, they are careful not to project or accept this title. Kaye was resigned to the fact that she would have to continually clarify her role with colleagues.

Debbie frequently felt that her colleagues were envious of her position as a school counsellor. Consequently, she often found herself having to keep up the counsellor appearance [italics added] and legitimize the value of her work. Kaye endured similar circumstances whereby she was very careful about the image she projected when in the work context. Of the co-researchers, it was interesting to hear how Debbie was sometimes under the impression that her colleagues were trying to turn her into a teacher [italics added] and in subtle ways prevented from doing her job. Although Debbie was initially vehemently resistant to the idea of

assuming teaching responsibilities, over time she conceded to the value of classroom experience and eventually softened her position.

In addition to regarding classroom experience as an opportunity to empathize with colleagues, John underscored the cohesiveness that can develop. By becoming actively involved in the classroom, John realized that his peers were becoming more aware and appreciative of his versatility and commitment to student development. Through close collaboration and mutual support, he and his colleagues worked toward the common goal of providing excellent services to students.

Theme IV: Community Networking

Networking with colleagues in the community is considered an invaluable exercise for all of the co-researchers. The benefits of the school counsellor remaining connected to colleagues, who share a common interest in the well-being of children, is discussed by Braucht & Weime (1990). Realizing their personal limitations and areas of expertise, each co-researcher elaborated on the importance of collaborating with colleagues to ensure that the needs of students and their families were being adequately addressed. This shared experience echoes Saba's (1991) earlier advice regarding the need for rural school counsellors to maintain frequent contact with individuals in existing interrelated occupations. The importance of such collaboration, particularly when resources are scarce, is highlighted by McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings (1984). As described by the co-researchers, community networking involved the establishment of relationships and close working alliances. Hughes & Clark (1981) accentuate the need to organize and develop formalized networks among community agencies that serve

children. As described by the co-researchers, their networking efforts often involved the co-facilitation of groups or on-going consultation. Regardless of the context, the notion of staying connected for the benefit of students was punctuated.

Networking took on an even more important meaning for individuals who witnessed the decrease in community resources. Alana, for example, realized how the loss of a community resource could leave a substantial void in the continuum of services. What seemed to evolve under these circumstances was a comradery and increased respect among existing professionals.

Remaining connected with colleagues within the community was also considered necessary in order to avoid professional isolation. With large numbers of students to serve, some of whom presented with serious psychological problems, the co-researchers periodically felt overwhelmed and burdened with enormous responsibility. Having a chance to share this burden, the co-researchers were better equipped to keep things in a healthy perspective.

The networking process also presented an opportunity for the co-researchers to remain abreast with current information concerning both student and professional development. While listening to the value that was placed on professional connection, the metaphor of a lifeline emerged.

A prominent theme which emerged when discussing community networking was the value of having someone to discuss concerns with while generating ideas. John, for example, elaborated on his participation in monthly informal meetings where he and his colleagues would discuss and share ideas. A positive spin-off, as alluded to by Jane, is that on-going networking helps her track referrals and to

keep abreast with a student's progress. As such, she feels connected and a part of the on-going process.

Theme V: Lack of Community Resources

The unavailability of necessary services was a unanimous concern, which is a common issue within the rural community as illustrated in chapter 2. The co-researchers drew a distinction however, between available resources within the school context and within the community at large. While elaborating on differences between urban and rural school counselling departments, John discussed how urban based schools typically have more in-house services at their immediate disposal. Both John and Alana emphasized how rural school counsellors were expected to be generalists [italics added] in order to meet the myriad of situations they encounter. Several authors (e.g., Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner, 1985; Furlong, 1980; Huebner & Huberty, 1984; McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings, 1984; Murray, 1984) contend that rural counsellors encounter a pressure to remain flexible and work in a generalist role, thus avoiding the specialization of expertise typically found in the urban center. Saba (1991) elaborates:

> It is not a question of not wishing to specialize in child abuse or developmental guidance or some other specific focus. Rather, it is a necessity to be a able to handle all types of guidance and counseling related situations simply because he or she is the only one with any proper qualifications in the area. p. 325

Not having the luxury of calling in a in-house specialist, they were forced to contend with what came their way. While describing this dimension of their job,

they continued to comment on the number of roles they were playing aside from that of school counsellor.

Kaye and Alana further commented on how expertise outside of the community was valuable but was also inaccessible due to the distance families had to travel. Another factor, of course, was related to parental motivation. Each co-researcher quickly admitted to using the services which were present when available.

The lack of resources impacted both students and counsellors. In terms of counsellors, knowing that services were not available added to their level of frustration and professional isolation. As previously mentioned, they would also begin to experience the burden of responsibility when there was no one to refer to. This shared experience has been noted by others (e.g., Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner, 1985) and in research findings (Sutton, 1988). Debbie vividly described the difficulty she experienced when having to watch a student's overall behavior deteriorate. Feeling frustrated and powerless, the co-researchers reported having to remind themselves of their roles and limitations. Nonetheless, at times, they were left reckoning with a sense of defeat.

Theme VI: Lack of Formal Training Opportunities

Inadequate supervision and limited opportunities to formally enhance counselling skills were identified by the co-researchers. Huebner & Huberty (1984) and Sutton & Southworth (1990) point out that appropriate supervision is a common problem within the rural setting and that school counsellors and school psychologists often report that their primary supervisor is the school superintendent. Being located at some distance from universities that offer counsellor training was seen as an obvious hurdle and drawback to professional

development. It is understood by many (e.g., Helge, 1985; Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner, 1985; McLeskey, Huebner & Cummings, 1984; Sutton, 1988; Sutton & Southworth, 1990) that the rural helper is not only isolated from a professional library and related resources but also from colleagues with whom they would normally exchange information. As previously noted, although formal support groups were valued and considered helpful, the co-researchers were aware that pursuing advanced education would entail a major commitment along with several logistical problems. As a result, the proposition of pursuing advanced training was non-feasible. From the co-researchers stories, it was not the anticipated course work that dissuaded them from pursuing advanced degrees or training but rather, the amount of time and expense involved in travel and out-of-town accommodations.

A related concern raised by Jane pertained to the fact that many of her rural counterparts did not have formal counsellor training. This situation troubled her in that she questioned the quality of counselling service provided and the possible impact inadequate service could have on the overall reputation of school counselling. John recalled a colleague becoming puzzled and slightly amused by John's interest in pursuing advanced training. The message he received was, why bother? [italics added]. Jane considered the pursuit of formal training as an issue of integrity but at the same time, was cognizant of the challenges rural counsellors face in obtaining such training. In general, despite attempts made by the universities to provide innovative outreach programs for rural counsellors, the co-researchers were aware of the obstacles that they faced. Although John

recognized the moral support he received from administration to advance his skills, the monetary or sabbatical support was not forthcoming.

Theme VII: Peer and Administrative Support

The degree of peer and administrative support experienced by each co-researcher was identified as significant in his or her daily functioning as a school counsellor. Interestingly enough however, a distinction was drawn between the support offered by both groups as described below.

Peer Support

It appeared that the ongoing support and cooperation of peers served to alleviate a sense of isolation and helped the co-researchers feel like part of the school team [italics added]. A lack of support however, had an opposite effect. Again, this reflects the physical and psychological isolation that can be experienced by rural school counsellors (Sutton, 1988). In Debbie's case for example, the opposition and lack of support she experienced created an increased sense of vulnerability and loneliness. Consequently, she decided to withdraw and seek refuge in her office. In some ways, although perhaps to a lesser degree, Kaye also felt outside of her peer group and operated in a very cautious manner due to a sense of vulnerability. In contrast, Jane and John were empowered by the support they received from their colleagues and became more involved in their community and school functions.

John, in particular, underscored the value of peer collaboration and describes how these conditions translate into better services for students. Not having to contend with covert resentment and power struggles, John experienced additional freedom to effectively perform his counselling duties. The poor communication

that can also ensue when support is lacking can culminate in personal needs being overlooked and thus, increased frustration and anger as shared by Debbie.

An interesting phenomenon that emerged pertained to a correlation between their perceived support and the level of confidence colleagues had in their work. John, for instance, regarded perceived collegial support as an indication that his peers had confidence in his work. Jane describes a similar experience when she speaks about her peers encouraging her to engage students outside of the school context. Kaye and Debbie however, were unsure about the support of their colleagues and subsequently remained very tentative.

Clearly, the stresses and demands of counselling were enough to contend with and the added pressure of internal conflict was not a welcome addition. This support had a major impact on how the co-researchers viewed themselves as school counsellors and was a measure of the work.

Administrative Support

Administrative support seemed to serve a different function for the co-researchers. Support from administrators appeared to be very helpful in terms of professional development, serving as a buffer with colleagues and assisting in the maintenance of a balanced workload. Peer support was more influential on a daily basis whereas administrative support was perceived as more global and less intimate. As stated in the literature, amidst the disadvantages of working within the context of a smaller school a marked advantage was the support and appreciation offered by the school administration (McIntire, Marion & Quaglia, 1990). Sutton & Southworth (1990) found in their study that rural counsellors

perceived relationships with administrators more positively than their counterparts in urban settings. These authors go on to say:

> ...there seem to be some extremely valuable benefits to being in a rural setting. The freedom to plan and implement a program and, thus, to chart one's own course, is apparent. There is likely to be a more supportive relationship with administrators, other staff members, and parents, which provides an atmosphere that invites risk and creativity. p. 178

Theme VIII: Continuity of Relationships

A valued component of their work, as expressed by the co-researchers, pertained to continued relationships with students and their families. Furlong (1980) states that often times urban based counsellors simply feel like just another cog in the wheel but rural counsellors understand that, "...they are all their students have in the way of guidance. They have no choice but to give their job everything they've got" (p. 46). It was generally agreed that rural schools encouraged and afforded school counsellors the opportunity to become very familiar with students and their families. As such, the co-researches were able to form meaningful relationships with students and thus, take a special interest in the academic progress and educational/career objectives. The opportunity to extend themselves to students may have carried special importance considering the tendency of students in the rural area to under-emphasize education. According to Helge (1985), "Many rural subcultures do not value education as highly as do nonrural communities" (p. 409). As reported by Alana and Jane, they had the chance to sit down with each grade twelve student on an individual basis to discuss their

situation. Being able to provide what they considered to be a personalized service [italics added] was identified as a distinct advantage of the rural school. The level of comfort in which students were able to experience while receiving this individualized service was also highlighted.

Each co-researcher seemed to intimate that the rural student was at some disadvantage due to their location and inaccessibility to post secondary institutions. To counter this perception, the co-researchers described how they went the extra mile [italics added] for students in order to create equal opportunities. Subsequently, this commitment appeared to be a major factor in the eventual formation of close counsellor-student collaboration.

Being in a position to become fully acquainted with families helped the co-researchers in becoming better prepared to help students and their younger siblings whom they eventually encountered. Debbie referred to herself as a possible bridge [italics added] between the students and their parents. As such, Debbie took her role very seriously and expressed great joy in working collaboratively with parents. As she described this aspect of her work, it appeared that Debbie saw herself as being more than a school counsellor and a protector of children with whom she was entrusted. As pointed out by Alana however, the closeness that formed between she and parents was not always looked upon favorably by students. Nevertheless, recognizing and appreciating family patterns and unique attributes added to their knowledge and future planning.

Being recognized, remembered and acknowledged by former students was especially meaningful for John. As shared by John, this was particularly true in cases where former students had progressed through the academic ranks to

become professional colleagues. Having a former student succeed and become a teacher generated an enormous sense of pride and accomplishment.

Alana and Kaye expressed their joy in knowing that parents had grown to trust and respect their work and that they would frequently call for advice or direction. As a matter of fact, Kaye was often surprised by the gratitude parents openly expressed to her. Although she considered what she was doing as simply part of her job description, she soon realized that some parents placed more value on her efforts.

A protectiveness and commitment seemed to develop between the co-researchers and their students. Perhaps this was best illustrated by how invested each co-researcher became in ensuring that the students received the best possible assistance. As stated by Allen & James (1990):

> In implementing the program, the counselor will assume a role that approximates that of a constant and consistent parent whom children can trust. The counselor will be a psychological anchor to whom children can look for help with decision making, for development of personal and social values, and for direct personal help in a milieu that may be overwhelming. p. 185

A common theme throughout the experiences was a genuine concern for students. Additionally, despite the daily challenges and hardships experienced by the co-researchers, they each remarked on times when their efforts were acknowledged by parents. This recognition seemed to be based on their ability to remain compassionate, flexible and respectful of students and their families despite the differences they had overcome.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

It seems that the potential strength of this study can be perceived as a weakness. In order to complete this project, for example, I became deeply engaged in the phenomenon and the stories of each co-researcher. As such, I experienced myself building meaningful relationships with these individuals. In addition, my passion for this topic increased as I became more immersed in the literature review. As I learned more about the experiences of rural school counsellors and rural school psychologists, my empathy for their unique circumstances and struggles grew bringing me closer to their shared experiences.

To ensure the accuracy of my descriptions, and to avoid projecting my own bias, steps were taken to increase the trustworthiness of this study. For example, the themes that I extracted from the interviews were shared openly with the co-researchers to see how these themes resonated with them. After an extensive review of the literature, it was apparent that the extracted themes correlated with sources within the literature. The aforementioned themes, along with supporting literature, was also shared with my dissertation supervisor for his review and feedback. Transcripts of all the interviews were made and kept on file as an ongoing record. Due to the level of subjectivity demanded of this research, the major test of its trustworthiness, as discussed in Chapter three, depended on whether or not outside readers would consider findings from this study credible. To determine this, two experienced rural counsellors, who were outside of this study, agreed to review each protocol in their entirety and provide feedback.

Despite the steps which were taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness, the subjective perspective of the researcher needs to be acknowledged. Additionally,

criticism could be directed toward the sample size of co-researchers. It should be reiterated however, that the sample size was not predetermined but rather rested on the recurrence of themes. The smaller sample size however, did afford me the opportunity to get a sensitive and deep reading of each co-researcher.

Although common themes emerged among the co-researchers, which correlated with sources within the literature, no claim to universal generalizability can be made. Nevertheless, the themes that did surface might prove useful in future planning in counsellor education programs. Due to the issue of confidentiality, I cannot provide specific demographic information (e.g., age, culture, location).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM PLANNING

Based on the available research, an understanding of the unique challenges encountered by the rural school counsellor is still in its infancy. According to Murray & Keller (1991) there are only a handful [italics added] of American graduate programs committed to rural training. Programs specific to Canadian schools did not appear in the literature. Realizing that prospective rural school counsellors are about to embark on a career involving unique cultural demands, the need for specialized instruction becomes apparent (McIntyre, Marion & Quaglia, 1990). Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner (1985), for example, question whether or not rural school psychology should be a subspecialty within clinical academic programs.

To ameliorate current problems associated with rural counselling, several ideas have emerged within the literature and include: the development of practicums and internships in rural settings, exposing students to relevant literature pertaining to rural culture and generalist training. In providing further clarification, Helge

(1985) reminds us that, "The difficulty posed by such areas is not the problem of preparing quantities or sheer numbers of school psychologists, but of preparing practitioners who are willing and capable of serving in areas which impose serious disincentives" (p. 413).

Meeting the needs of school counsellors who are presently working within a rural setting is also an issue warranting attention. Consequently, professional development programs should be designed to address their specific circumstances. In doing so, the main issues of isolation and attrition can be addressed and perhaps prevented. While acknowledging the benefits of working in the rural area (Sutton & Southworth, 1990), there is a need for ongoing research to better understand rural school counselling and the implications associated with this career (Saba, 1991). Although there is valuable information available in the literature regarding rural school counsellors there remains a great deal to know about this professional population.

EPILOGUE

As a neat and tidy closure to this manuscript, I suppose it would be customary to comment on how meaningful [italics added] this entire project has been. Until a recent conversation involving several members of my committee, such commentary might have sufficed albeit tinged in superficiality. However, while reflecting on this research project during the aforementioned conversation I became acutely aware of personal traits which until now have remained unarticulated. More specifically, two central themes surfaced for me and included: my protectiveness of the co-researchers and the impact of my counselling experience in the rural area. This personal discovery was both pleasing and thought provoking.

During the interviewing process, I felt a loyalty and caring for each co-researcher. Although experiencing these feelings, I did not immediately attend to them. It was only during conversations with my committee that my respect and admiration for the co-researchers actually emerged. In sharing my experience I described my gratitude toward the co-researchers and my concern about their welfare. Ensuring appropriate boundaries and a respectful relationship was obviously crucial to me. Realizing that the co-researchers were willing to share their time, become vulnerable and entrust me with their stories was meaningful in the true sense of the word. Feeling a sense of responsibility, I found myself taking this project very seriously and with great passion.

Shortly into the project, I realized how my rural counselling experience, although not as a school counsellor, was influential in helping me understand many of the experiences described by the co-researchers. Without question, our shared experiences created a bonding that in turn influenced my sense of protectiveness. The caring and protectiveness which I am referring to is like a double edged sword. On one hand, I believe these characteristics came through during my interactions with the co-researchers. As such, I am assuming that the co-researchers were not adverse to my reactions. Perhaps these characteristics even helped in the engagement process. On the other hand however, my subjectivity may have prevented me from delving deeper into the lived experience of each co-researcher. In my attempt to remain respectful of these professionals I might have been overly cautious resulting in a less detailed account of their experience. In retrospect, I now appreciate the critical decision process in which I found myself and remain comfortable with this decision.

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